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M,DCC,XC.

A

FREE INQUIRY

INTO THE

NATURE AND ORIGIN

OF

EVIL.

IN SIX LETTERS TO——

WITH

AN ADDITIONAL PREFACE, AND SOME EXPLANATORY NOTES.

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PREFACE.

THE author of the following letters is too well acquainted with human nature to be in the leaſt ſurpriſed at the reception they have met with; that is, that they have been much liked, much cenſured, and little aſſented to: Truth, he knows, has at all times been ſo received; for though by her native beauty ſhe is ſure to charm, yet from her repugnancy to moſt men's intereſts, ſhe is ſeldom welcome: politicians are afraid of her, parties deteſt her, and all profeſſions agree that ſhe is mad, and very dangerous if ſuffered to go about in public: he knows that mankind live all in maſquerade, and that whoever preſumes to come amongſt them barefaced muſt expect to be abuſed by the whole aſſembly: he could therefore have no motive for thus imparting his free ſentiments to the public, except the dictates of his own heart, which tell him, that it is every man's duty, who comes into the world, to uſe his beſt endeavours, however inſignificant, to leave it as much

much wiſer, and as much better as he can Induced by this motive alone, he at firſt undertook this inquiry; and now, actuated by the ſame principle, and unprovoked by all the ſenſeleſs miſapprehenſions, and malicious miſconſtructions, with which it has been tortured, he will here, with all poſſible conciſeneſs, endeavour to explain thoſe parts of it, which have been ſo miſunderſtood, or miſrepreſented, and give ſatisfaction to all, who are either able or willing to underſtand it.

The firſt letter treats of evils in general, and endeavours to prove, that they all owe their exiſtence, not to any voluntary admiſſion of a benevolent Creator, but to the neceſſity of their own natures, that is, to the impoſſibility of excluding them from any ſyſtem of created beings whatever; and that in all ſuch ſyſtems, however wiſely contrived, they muſt have, and muſt at all times have had a place. Againſt this but one material objection has been urged; which is this, that, in order to make room for this neceſſity of evil, the real exiſtence of a paradiſiacal ſtate is repreſented as at all times impoſſible; and, conſequently, the Moſaic account of that ſtate is utterly exploded, on which the whole fabric of the Chriſtian religion is erected. How far the literal belief of that account is eſſential to the true faith of a Chriſtian need not be here decided; becauſe not the leaſt mention of it is made in this letter: and therefore this objection is in-

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tirely founded on a miſtake. The argument there made uſe of is only this, that ſome have endeavoured to juſtify the goodneſs of God from the introduction of evil, by aſſerting, that at the beginning there was no ſuch thing, but that, at firſt, all creation came out of his omnipotent hand, endued with abſolute perfection, and free from all evil, both natural and moral: to ſhew that this was an ancient opinion, ſome lines are quoted from Ovid's Metamorphoſis, deſcribing the Golden Age, in ſuch a ſtate of perfect happineſs and innocence; on which the author, thinking them to be no part of any one's creed, imagined himſelf at liberty to obſerve, that from the nature of man, and the nature of this terreſtrial globe, which he inhabits, the real exiſtence of ſuch a ſtate ſeemed impoſſible; and therefore, that theſe deſcriptions of it could be nothing more than amuſing dreams and inchanting fables. This bears not the leaſt reference to the Moſaic account of Paradiſe, in which ſuch a ſtate of abſolute perfection, void of all evil, is ſo far from being deſcribed, that the ſerpent, or the devil, the parent of all evil, is one of the principal characters of that hiſtory; which therefore by no means contradicts the propoſition here aſſerted.

The ſecond letter undertakes to ſhew, that evils of imperfection are in truth no evils at all; but only the abſence of comparative good, reſulting ſolely from the neceſſary inferiority

feriority of ſome beings with regard to others, which cannot be prevented in a ſyſtem of creation, whoſe very eſſence conſiſts in a chain of ſubordination, deſcending from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing. To this likewiſe one objection only has been made; which is, that no ſuch chain of ſubordinate beings, reaching from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing, can, in fact, exiſt, for this notable reaſon; becauſe no being can approach next to infinite perfection, nor any be contiguous to nothing. But this argument being no more than a quibble on metaphyſical terms, to which no preciſe ideas are affixed, neither deſerves, nor is capable of an anſwer.

The third letter treats of natural evils; and attempts to ſhew, that moſt of theſe, which we complain of, are derived likewiſe from the ſame ſource; that is, from the imperfection of our natures, and our ſtation in the univerſal ſyſtem: to this are added three conjectures; firſt, that many of our miſeries may be owing to ſome ſecret, but invincible diſpoſition, in the nature of things, that renders it impracticable to produce pleaſure excluſive of pain; a certain degree of which muſt therefore be endured by individuals, for the happineſs and well being of the whole; ſecondly, that many other of our miſeries may be inflicted on us by the agency of ſuperior beings, to whoſe benefit they may poſſibly be as conducive as the deaths and ſufferings of inferior animals are to ours; and

and laſtly, that by the ancient doctrine of tranſmigration, the miſeries, which for the ſake of general utility we are obliged to ſuffer in one life, may be recompenced in another, and ſo the divine goodneſs be ſufficiently juſtified from the admiſſion of them all. To every one of theſe ſome objections have been made: againſt the firſt, it has been alledged, that this impracticability to produce pleaſure without pain, whence ariſes this utility of the ſufferings of individuals for the good of the whole, is merely a production of the author's own daring imagination, founded on no reaſon, and ſupported by no proof. To which he anſwers, that he propoſes it as a conjecture only; but cannot think it ill-founded, ſince it is confirmed by the appearance of every thing around us, and ſince it is reaſonable to believe, that a benevolent Creator would not have permitted his creatures to have ſuffered on any other terms. In ridicule of the ſecond conjecture, it has been aſked, with an air of humour, whether we can think it credible that ſuperior beings ſhould ride, or hunt, or roaſt, or eat us, as we make uſe of inferior animals? Which queſtion is moſt properly to be anſwered by another; whether, in the unbounded ſyſtem of creation, there may not be numberleſs methods, by which beings of different orders may be ſubſervient to each others uſes, totally above the reach of our comprehenſions? To doubt of which would

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be like the incredulity of the ignorant peaſant, who can ſcarce be perſuaded to believe that there is any thing in the world, ſome ſpecimen of which he has not beheld within the narrow limits of his own pariſh. To the laſt it is objected, that the doctrine of tranſmigration being only the fanciful and exploded opinion of ſome ancient philoſophers, in the times of darkneſs, ought not, by the author, to have been here advanced in direct contradiction to the faith and tenets of the Chriſtian religion: to which he replies, that he neither propoſes this doctrine as an article of his own belief, or impoſes it on others; but mentions it only as the moſt rational conjecture of the human mind, uninformed by ſupernatural aſſiſtance, concerning a future ſtate; that it is confirmed by Revelation he does not pretend, but that it directly contradicts it, by no means appears. So ſilent are the ſcriptures concerning the ſtate of the ſoul between death and the reſurrection, that the moſt learned divines ſtill widely differ on that ſubject; ſome maintaining that it enters immediately into a ſtate of retribution; others, of ſleep; and others, of purgation from paſt offences: why therefore is it more repugnant to the ſenſe of theſe writings to ſuppoſe, that it may poſſibly animate other bodies during that period, and, at the laſt day, receive ſuch puniſhments or rewards as are due on the whole account of its paſt behaviour? Thus the probability of eve-

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ry one of theſe conjectures ſeems to be ſufficiently eſtabliſhed, and they appear perfectly conſiſtent with reaſon, and not at all contradictory to revelation.

The fourth letter endeavours to account for moral evil: the moſt arduous part of the whole undertaking; to which end it attempts to ſhew, that the common opinion, which derives it ſolely from the abuſe of free-will in man, is ineffectual for that purpoſe; and that therefore, though its very eſſence conſiſts in the production of natural evil, yet it could never have been admitted into the works of a juſt and beneficent Creator, if it had not ſome remote and collateral tendency to univerſal good, by anſwering ſome ends beneficial to the immenſe and incomprehenſible whole; one of which may poſſibly be the converſion of unpreventable miſeries into juſt puniſhments by the production of guilt, without which they muſt have been inflicted on perfect innocence. To this account of the origin of moral evil, not only many weighty objections have been made, but on it many imputations have been laid of a moſt formidable nature, as that it makes God the cauſe of all wickedneſs, deſtroys free-will in man, and conſequently roots up the foundation of all virtue and morality whatever; and it is, moreover, charged with inconſiſtency and ſelf-contradiction through every part. To all this the author replies only, that he is aſ-

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ſured, that, if any intelligent reader will peruſe the whole letter together with candor and attention, it will evidently appear that theſe accuſations are entirely groundleſs. He makes no manner of doubt, but that man is endued with free-will, and is juſtly puniſhable for the abuſe of it; and hopes he has ſo expreſſed himſelf, through this whole piece, as to leave no uncertainty of his opinion on that queſtion: all he means is, that though the abuſe of free-will is undoubtedly the immediate cauſe of moral evil, yet it cannot from thence derive its original admiſſion into the works of a benevolent Creator; becauſe man, not being a ſelf-exiſtent and independent being, muſt receive that will itſelf, together with his nature and formation, from the ſupreme Author of all things; for which reaſon he cannot apprehend, that the general wickedneſs of mankind can be an accident proceeding from their unforeſeen wrong elections, by which the whole benevolent ſyſtem is defeated; but muſt be a part, and a material part too, of the original plan of creation, wiſely calculated by the incomprehenſible operations of vice and puniſhment, to promote the good and happineſs of the whole. For to aſſert, that any thing has happened which God did not intend, or that he intended any thing which did not happen, is a language which may be allowed to the poet or the orator, but never to the philoſopher; unleſs we can ſuppoſe, that omniſci-

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ence can be diſappointed, and omnipotence defeated. As to inconſiſtency, he denies not the charge; but believes he is not more inconſiſtent than all who have undertaken to write on the ſame ſubject: the ſcriptures themſelves are guilty of the ſame ſeeming inconſiſtency on this head; they all preſent man as a being perfectly free, puniſhable, and puniſhed for his miſbehaviour; yet as conſtantly ſpeak of him as a creature deriving all his thought, will, and diſpoſitions from his Creator, and under his perpetual influence and direction; the appearance of inconſiſtency, in which two propoſitions, both undoubtedly true, proceeds only from our ignorance in the nature and limits of free-will, and divine influence, and our inability to comprehend them. In the latter part of this letter a few hints are flung out, to ſhew that on the principles of the foregoing theory ſome of the moſt abſtruſe doctrines of the Chriſtian revelation of original ſin, grace, predeſtination, and vicarious puniſhment, might be rendered reconcileable to the ſtricteſt reaſon; a propoſal from whence ſurely much advantage might accrue to the cauſe of Chriſtianity in general, and by which poſſibly ſome articles of our own church might be proved to be much leſs incompatible with common ſenſe than they are thought to be by all thoſe who will not ſubſcribe them, and by many who do: with this, two claſſes of men are particularly offended; the rational

al diſſenters, as they pleaſe to call themſelves, and the methodiſts: the former of theſe having arbitrarily expunged out of their bibles every thing which appears to them contradictory to reaſon, that is, to their own reaſon, or, in other words, every thing which they cannot underſtand, are diſpleaſed to ſee thoſe tenets explained, which they have thought proper to reject: the latter, having embraced theſe very doctrines only becauſe they appeared unintelligible, are unwilling to ſee them cleared up, and afraid leſt thoſe dark and thorny covers ſhould be laid open, under which they have ſo long ſheltered themſelves from the rays of reaſon: with either of theſe all debate would be vain and uſeleſs; becauſe the firſt, though for the moſt part honeſt, religious, and learned men, are unable to comprehend any reaſoning, which ſoars above the limits of their own confined literature and education; and the others are determined to liſten to no reaſoning at all, having with all reaſon and common ſenſe declared eternal warfare.

The deſign of the fifth letter is to ſhew, that in the government of ſuch imperfect creatures as men over each other there muſt be much unavoidable evil; that all human governments, whether of the monarchical, popular, or mixed kinds, were at firſt founded on force or intereſt, and muſt ever be ſupported by the ſame means, that is, by compulſion or corruption, both of which muſt be

be productive of innumerable evils; that theſe ought not to be imputed to God, becauſe he could not have prevented them without the total alteration of human nature; much leſs can they be eradicated by men; but that they may in ſome meaſure be leſſened by the diminution of moral evil, from which all political evils are derived; and therefore that we ought quickly to ſubmit to theſe evils, when they do not ariſe to any intolerable degree, and to apply principally that remedy to the faults of government, which is ever the moſt effectual, that is, the amendment of our own. It is no wonder, that a leſſon ſo diſagreeable to the reſtleſs humours of moſt men, and ſo repugnant to the arts and ends of faction, ſhould call up againſt the author many opponents, who have liberally beſtowed on him the titles of enemy to liberty, and an advocate for corruption, with the ſame juſtice that a phyſician might be ſtiled an enemy to health, and an advocate for the gout, who in that diſtemper preſcribes patience and temperance, rather than ſuch inflaming medicines as might convert it into a more dangerous diſeaſe. All that he has aſſerted in this letter amounts to no more than this: that no government can ſubſiſt without ſome principle of governing; that is, that men cannot be governed without ſome means by which their obedience can be obtained; a propoſition, which ſeems as inconteſtible, as that every effect

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muſt have a cauſe. That all government muſt be diſagreeable to thoſe who are governed, is demonſtrable from the nature and eſſence of government itſelf, which being nothing more than a compulſion of individuals to act in ſuch a manner in ſupport of ſociety, as they are neither wiſe nor honeſt enough to do from the ſuggeſtions of their own heads or hearts; this compulſion muſt be contrary to both their judgments and inclinations, and conſequently diſagreeable, and for that reaſon perpetually reſiſted: ſome method muſt therefore be made uſe of to overcome this reſiſtance, and what that method can be, except force or intereſt, he cannot find out: he is an advocate for neither, except from their neceſſity; and if any one will point out another, he will readily declare his diſapprobation of them both.

The ſixth and laſt letter proceeds upon the ſame plan as the reſt, and endeavours to ſhew, that religious evils, that is, the defects ſo viſible in all human religions, and the miſchievous conſequences reſulting from them, are not owing to any want of wiſdom or goodneſs in our Creator, but proceed, like all others, from our nature and ſituation, and the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature. In order to explain this, it was neceſſary to point out the particular imperfections, which in fact do exiſt in all human religions, whether natural or revealed; not with any deſign to depreciate

depreciate the one, or to invalidate the authority of the other, but only to account for them conſiſtently with God's wiſdom and benevolence: thoſe charged upon natural religion have been readily enough agreed to, but thoſe imputed to revelation have offended many, who have from thence conſidered the whole of this enquiry as intended ſecretly to undermine the foundations of Chriſtianity, than which nothing can be more averſe from the intentions, as well as from the ſentiments of the author; but indeed many late deiſtical writers have attacked that religion ſo unfairly, by inſinuating many cavils, which they dared not expreſs, that they have made it very difficult for any one to treat freely on that ſubject, without incurring the ſuſpicion of the ſame inſincerity: of all ſuch diſingenuous artifices the author ſincerely declares his utmoſt deteſtation, and begs to be underſtood to mean all that he expreſſes, and nothing more; he ſolemnly profeſſes, that by recounting theſe imperfections, he is ſo far from entertaining any ſecret deſigns deſtructive to that ſacred inſtitution, that by it he intended not only to wreſt out of the hand of infidelity thoſe weapons, with which it has ever been moſt ſucceſsfully aſſaulted, but alſo to obviate all thoſe doubts and difficulties which frequently occur to the minds of thinking men, though no infidels, on viewing the deplorable ſtate in which all human religion has continued throughout all

ages, and the ineffectual affiſtance it has received even from this divine interpoſition itſelf, by no means exempted from numberleſs evils and imperfections: to thoſe, who perceive none of theſe imperfections, and conſequential evils, he means not to write, nor deſires to let in any new light on their tender organs, which can ſerve only to diſturb their preſent repoſe; nor does he aſpire to the honour of working for thoſe middle-ſized underſtandings, who can be well fitted with ready-made arguments from every pulpit: to the learned, impartial, ſagacious, and inquiſitive, he alone applies; the eſtabliſhing one of whom in a rational and well-grounded belief of the Chriſtian Religion does more real ſervice to that cauſe, than the enliſting legions under that denomination whoſe immoveable faith proceeds only from their ignorance; that is, who believing without any reaſon, can poſſibly have no reaſon for doubting. To account for the corruption of religion, it was neceſſary to ſpecify the particular abuſes, and abuſers of it; and here the author could ſcarcely overlook the clergy; but he hopes that nothing has eſcaped his pen, that can throw the leaſt reflection upon them as clergy, but as men only, ſubject to the ſame imperfections, and actuated by the ſame paſſions as other men, and purſuing the ends of ſelf-intereſt and ambition by the ſame paths, in which all others would have trod, conducted by the ſame temptations

tions and opportunities; he has treated them with no more freedom than he has done princes and parliaments, miniſters and patriots, conquerors and heroes, and his work would admit of no partiality; ſure he is, that nothing he has ſaid can bear the moſt diſtant relation to the preſent clergy of this country, whom he ſincerely thinks are a body of men as honeſt, learned, and unprejudiced, as ever exiſted, and for whoſe perſons and profeſſion he has the higheſt regard. In another part of this letter there is an aſſertion, which has given ſome offence; which is, that every religion muſt be corrupted as ſoon as it becomes eſtabliſhed; this has been thought a reflection upon all national churches, and a perſuaſion to ſchiſm and diſſention; but thoſe who think thus, totally miſapprehend the tenor of this whole work, which endeavours to prove that every thing human muſt be attended with evils, which therefore ought to be ſubmitted to with patience and reſignation; that many imperfections will adhere to all governments and religions in the hands of men, but that theſe, unleſs they riſe to an intolerable degree, will not juſtify our reſiſtance to the one, or our diſſention from the other; the aſſertion itſelf, the author cannot retract, but the inference, which he deſires may be drawn from it, is by no means favourable to diſſentions, becauſe from them he can perceive no remedy, which can accrue to theſe

evils; for if it was every one's duty to deſert a national church on account of thoſe corruptions which proceed from its eſtabliſhment, and this duty was univerſally compliſed with, let us ſee the conſequence! one of theſe things muſt neceſſarily follow: either that ſome diſſention of ſuperior purity, which uſually ariſes from its being a diſſention, muſt be eſtabliſhed in its room, or no religion muſt be eſtabliſhed at all; if the firſt of theſe methods ſhould take place, the end propoſed by it would by itſelf be entirely defeated; becauſe that purer religion which was eſtabliſhed, would by that very eſtabliſhment become equally corrupt with that which was deſerted; and ſo the ſame reaſon would eternally remain for a new diſſention: if the latter ſhould be taken, that is, to eſtabliſh no religion at all; this would be ſo far from producing the intended reformation, that it would let in ſuch an inundation of enthuſiaſm and contradictory abſurdities, as muſt in a ſhort time deſtroy not only all religion, but all peace and morality whatever; of which no one can entertain the leaſt doubt, who is not totally unacquainted both with the nature and hiſtory of mankind. From whence it is plain, that all diſſentions from a national church, not in itſelf ſinful, ariſe from ignorance; that is, from a kind of ſhort-ſightedneſs, which enables men to pry out every imperfection within their reach, but prevents their diſcerning the more remote neceſſity for thoſe imper-

imperfections, and the danger of amending them.

To conclude; the author of this enquiry having heard it ſo much, and as he thought ſo unjuſtly calumniated, has reviewed it with all poſſible care and impartiality, and though he finds many things in the ſtile and compoſition, which have need enough of amendment, he ſees nothing in the ſentiments which ought to be retracted. His intentions were to reconcile the numerous evils ſo conſpicuous in the creation, with the wiſdom, power, and goodneſs of the Creator; to ſhew that no more of them are admitted by him, than are neceſſary towards promoting univerſal good; and from thence to perſuade men to an entire reſignation to his all wiſe, but incomprehenſible diſpenſations. To aſcertain the nature of virtue, and to enforce the practice of it; to prove the certainty of a future ſtate, and the juſtice of the rewards and puniſhments that will attend it; to recommend ſubmiſſion to national governments, and conformity to national religions, notwithſtanding the evils and defects, which muſt unavoidably adhere to them; and laſtly, to ſhew the excellence and credibility of the Chriſtian revelation, to reconcile ſome of its moſt abſtruſe doctrines with reaſon, and to anſwer all thoſe objections to its authority, which have been drawn from its imperfections and abuſes; theſe, and theſe only, were the intentions of the author; and

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if, after all, a work ſo deſigned, however unably executed, ſhould by the united force of ignorance and malevolence, of faction, bigotry, and enthuſiaſm, be repreſented as introductive of fataliſm, immorality, ſlavery, corruption, and infidelity, he ſhall be little concerned, and ſhall only look upon it as an additional inſtance of that imperfection of mankind, which he has here treated of; from them he deſires only an exemption from calumny; honour and applauſe he has not the vanity to hope for; theſe, he knows, they beſtow not on their benefactors or inſtructors, but reſerve for thoſe alone who deceive, diſturb, and deſtroy them.

LETTER I.

ON EVIL IN GENERAL.

SIR,

HAVING enjoyed the pleaſure of many accidental conferences with you on metaphyſical, moral, political, and religious ſubjects; on which you ever ſeemed to converſe with more ſagacity, as well as more candor, than is uſual on the like occaſions; I imagined it might not be unentertaining either to you or myſelf, to put together my ſentiments on theſe important topics, and communicate them to you from time to time as the abſence of buſineſs, or of more agreeable amuſements, may afford me opportunity. This I propoſe to do under the general title of an Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil; an inquiry which will comprehend them all, and which, I think, has never been attended to with that diligence it deſerves, nor with that ſucceſs, which might have been hoped for from that little that has been beſtowed upon it. The right underſtanding of this abſtruſe ſpeculation, I look upon to be the only ſolid foundation, on which any rational ſyſtem of ethics can be built; for it ſeems impoſſible, that men ſhould ever arrive at any juſt ideas of their Creator or his attributes, any proper notions of

of their relation to him, or their duty to each other, without firſt ſettling in their minds ſome ſatisfactory ſolution of this important queſtion, *Whence came Evil?* Whilſt we find ourſelves liable to innumerable miſeries in this life; apprehenſive of ſtill greater in another, and can give no probable account of this our wretched ſituation, what ſentiments muſt we entertain of the juſtice and benevolence of our Creator, who placed us in it, without our ſolicitations or conſent? The works of the creation ſufficiently demonſtrate his exiſtence; their beauty, perfection, and magnificence, his infinite power and wiſdom; but it is the happineſs only which we enjoy or hope for, which can convince us of his goodneſs.

It is the ſolution therefore of this important queſtion alone, that can aſcertain the moral characteriſtic of God, and upon that only muſt all human virtue eternally depend.

> If there's a power above us,
> (And that there is all Nature cries aloud
> Thro' all her works) he muſt delight in virtue,
> And that which he delights in, muſt be happy.

But ſhould this divine reaſoning of the philoſopher be at leaſt inconcluſive; could we once entertain ſuch blaſphemous notions of the Supreme Being, as that he might not delight in virtue, neither adhere to it himſelf, nor reward it in others: that he could make any part of his creation miſerable, or ſuffer them to make themſelves ſo without a juſt cauſe

cauſe and a benevolent end, all moral conſiderations muſt be vain and uſeleſs; we can have no rule by which to direct our actions, nor if we had, any kind of obligation to purſue it; nor in this caſe can any revelation in the leaſt aſſiſt us, the belief of all revelation being in its own nature ſubſequent, not only to the belief of God's exiſtence, but of his juſtice and veracity; for if God can injure us, he may alſo deceive us; and then there is an end of all diſtinctions between good and evil, truth and falſehood, and of all confidence in God and man.

I mean not by this to inſinuate the leaſt poſſibility of a doubt concerning the juſtice or goodneſs of our Creator, but only to ſhew the importance of this inquiry, and the utility of it towards ſettling our notions of his attributes, and the regulation of our own behaviour in conformity to them. I intend not by it to prove the benevolence of God, but to reconcile the miſeries we ſee and ſuffer, with that incontrovertible benevolence; I deſign not to ſhew that God approves virtue, but that the admiſſion of moral evil is not inconſiſtent with that undoubted approbation; nor would I be underſtood to aſſert, that our obligation to be virtuous depends on this abſtruſe ſpeculation, but only that our right underſtanding it will remove all doubts concerning the nature of virtue, and our obligation to purſue it, and fix them on the moſt firm and immoveable baſis.

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To find out therefore how evil of any kind can be the production of infinite goodneſs, joined with infinite power, ſhould be the firſt ſtep in all our religious inquiries; the examination into which wonderful paradox will lead us into many uſeful and ſublime truths; and its perfect comprehenſion, was that poſſible for our narrow capacities, would, I doubt not, make as ſurpriſing diſcoveries in the moral world, as mathematical and phyſical knowledge have in the natural.

To clear up this difficulty, ſome ancient philoſophers have had recourſe to the ſuppoſition of two firſt cauſes, one good, and the other evil, perpetually counteracting each other's deſigns. This ſyſtem was afterwards adopted by the *Manichæan* hereſy, and has ſince been defended by the ingenious *Monſ. Bayle:* but as the ſuppoſition of two firſt cauſes is even in itſelf a contradiction, and as the whole ſcheme has been demonſtrated by the beſt metaphyſical writers to be as falſe as it is impious, all further arguments to diſprove it would be needleſs.

Others have endeavoured to account for this by the introduction of a golden age, or paradiſiacal ſtate, in which all was innocence and happineſs.

Pœna metuſque aberant, nec verba minacia fixo
Ære legebantur, nec ſupplex turba timebat
Judicis ora ſui: ſed erant ſine vindice tuti.

When man yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted reaſon knew,
And with a native bent did good purſue;
Unforced

Unforced by puniſhment, unaw'd by fear,
His words were ſimple and his ſoul ſincere:
Needleſs was written law, when none oppreſt,
The law of man was written in his breaſt:
No ſuppliant crowds before the judge appear'd,
No court erected yet, nor cauſe was heard,
But all was ſafe, for conſcience was their guard.

Ver erat æternum, placidique tepentibus auris
Mulcebant Zephyri natos ſine ſemine flores;
Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,
Nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat ariſtis,
Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris ibant,
Flavaque de viridi ſtillabant ilice mella.

The flow'rs unſown in fields and meadows reign'd,
And weſtern winds immortal ſpring maintain'd.
In following years the bearded corn enſu'd
From each unaſk'd, nor was that earth renew'd.
From veins of valleys milk and nectar broke,
And honey ſweated from the pores of oak.

Amuſing dreams! as abſurd in philoſophy, as in poetry delightful! For though it is probable, from the moſt ancient hiſtories, as well as from analogy drawn from the reſt of Nature's productions, that the world might be more happy and more innocent in its infancy, than in more advanced ages; yet that it could ever be totally free from vice and miſery, may eaſily, I think, be proved impoſſible, both from the nature of this terreſtrial globe, and the nature of its inhabitants. So that theſe inchanting ſcenes can in fact never have exiſted; but if they had, the ſhort duration of this perfection is equally inconſiſtent with infinite power, joined to infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, as any original imperfections whatever. Fables then of this

this kind can never in the leaſt account for the origin of evil; they are all but mean expedients, which will never be able to take away the difficulty, and can at moſt but obſcure it, by ſhifting it a little backward into a leſs clear light; like that *Indian* philoſophy, accounting for the ſupport of the world, which informs us, that it is ſuſtained by a vaſt elephant, and that elephant by a tortoiſe, and then prudently drops any further inquiry.

The divines and moraliſts of later ages ſeem perfectly ſatisfied that they have looſed this Gordian knot, by imputing the ſource of all evil to the abuſe of free-will in created beings. God, they ſay, never deſigned any ſuch thing ſhould exiſt as evil, moral or natural; but that giving to ſome beings, for good and wiſe purpoſes, a power of free-agency, they perverted this power to bad ends, contrary to his intentions and commands; and thus their accidental wickedneſs produced conſequential miſery. But to ſuppoſe in this manner, that God intended all things to be good and happy, and at the ſame time gave being to creatures able and willing to obſtruct his benevolent deſigns, is a notion ſo inconſiſtent with his wiſdom, goodneſs, omniſcience, and omnipotence, that it ſeems equally unphiloſophical, and more evidently abſurd than the other. They have been led into this error by ridiculouſly judging of the diſpenſations of a Creator to his

his creatures, by the ſame rules which they apply to the dealings of men towards each other; between which there is not the leaſt proportion or ſimilitude. A man who endeavours, to the utmoſt of his power, to make others virtuous and happy, however unſucceſsful, is ſufficiently juſtified; but in a Being omnipotent and omniſcient, the cauſe of all cauſes, the origin of all thought, will and action; who ſees all things paſt, preſent and to come, in one inſtantaneous view, the caſe is widely different; his active and permiſſive will muſt be exactly the ſame; and, in regard to him, all conſequential and future evils, through every moment of time, are actually preſent.

Since therefore none of theſe pretended ſolutions can, I am certain, give ſatisfaction to your comprehenſive underſtanding, let us now try to find out one more rational and more conſiſtent with the analogy of every thing around us.

That there is a ſupreme Being infinitely powerful, wiſe, and benevolent, the great Creator and Preſerver of all things, is a truth ſo clearly demonſtrated, that it ſhall here be taken for granted. That there is alſo in the univerſal ſyſtem of things, the works of his almighty hand, much miſery and wickedneſs, that is, much natural and moral evil, is another truth, of which every hour's fatal experience cannot fail to convince us. How theſe two undoubted, yet

ſeeming

ſeeming contradictory truths can be reconciled, that is, how evils of any ſort could have place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, is very difficult to account for. If we aſſert that he could not prevent them, we deſtroy his power; if that he would not, we arraign his goodneſs; and therefore his power and goodneſs cannot both be infinite.

But however concluſive this argument may ſeem, there is ſomewhere or other an error in it; and this error I take to ariſe from our wrong notions of omnipotence. Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, it can only effect all poſſible things. But ſo little are we acquainted with the whole ſyſtem of nature, that we know not what are poſſible, and what are not; but, if we may judge from that conſtant mixture of pain with pleaſure, and of inconvenience with advantage, which we muſt obſerve in every thing around us, we have reaſon to conclude, that to endue created beings with perfection, that is, to produce good excluſive of evil is one of thoſe impoſſibilities which even infinite power cannot accompliſh.

The true ſolution then of this incomprehenſible paradox muſt be this, that all evils owe their exiſtence ſolely to the neceſſity of their own natures; by which I mean, they could not poſſibly have been prevented, without the loſs of ſome ſuperior good, or the permiſſion of ſome greater evil than themſelves

themſelves; or that many evils will unavoidably inſinuate themſelves by the natural relations and circumſtances of things, into the moſt perfect ſyſtem of created beings, even in oppoſition to the will of an Almighty Creator, by reaſon they cannot be excluded without working contradictions; which not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of omnipotence to affirm that it cannot effect them.

And here it will be proper to make a previous apology for an expreſſion, which will frequently occur in the following pages, which is, that God cannot do ſuch and ſuch things; by which is always to be underſtood not any retrenchment of the divine omnipotence, but only that ſuch things are in their own natures impracticable, and impoſſible to be performed.

That the Almighty ſhould be thus limited, and circumſcribed by the nature of things, of which he himſelf is the author, may to ſome ſeem not very intelligible; but ſurely it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every poſſible method of ordering, diſpoſing, and framing the univerſal ſyſtem of things, ſuch numberleſs inconveniences might neceſſarily ariſe, that all that infinite power and wiſdom could do, was to make choice of that method, which was attended with the leaſt and feweſt; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator, but from that impreſſion which is inherent in the nature of all created things.

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This neceſſity, I imagine, is what the ancients meant by fate, to which they fancied that *Jupiter* and all the gods were obliged to ſubmit, and which was to be controuled by no power whatever. The *Stoicks* ſeem to have had ſome dark and unintelligible notions of this kind, which they neither underſtood themſelves, nor knew how to explain to others; that the untractableneſs of matter was the cauſe of evil; that God would have made all things perfect, but that there was in matter an evil bias repugnant to his benevolence, which drew another way, whence aroſe all manner of evils. Of the like kind is a maxim of the ſame philoſophers, that pain is no evil; which, if aſſerted with regard to the individuals who ſuffer it, is downright nonſenſe; but if conſidered as it affects the univerſal ſyſtem, is an undoubted truth, and means only that there is no more pain in it than what is neceſſary to the production of happineſs. How many ſoever of theſe evils then force themſelves into the creation, ſo long as the good preponderates, it is a work well worthy of infinite wiſdom and benevolence; and notwithſtanding the imperfections of its parts, the whole is moſt undoubtedly perfect.

Hence then we may plainly ſee that much evil may exiſt, not at all inconſiſtent with the power and goodneſs of God; and the further we purſue this clue, the more we ſhall, at every ſtep, diſcern new lights break out,

out, which will discover clearly numberless examples, where the infinite power and goodness of God is fairly reconcileable with the misery and wickedness of his creatures, from the impossibility of preventing them; and if, in the very small part of the universal system that lies within the reach of our imperfect capacities, many instances of this kind appear, in which they are visibly consistent, we ought, with the utmost assurance, to conclude what is undoubtedly true, that they are really so in all, though we are not able to comprehend them. This is the kind of faith most worthy of the human understanding, and most meritorious in the sight of God, as it is the offspring of reason, as well as the parent of all virtue and resignation to the just, but unscrutable dispensations of providence.

But in order more clearly to explain this abstruse speculation, it will be necessary to divide evils into their different species, and bestow on each a separate consideration. This I shall do under the following heads: Evils of Imperfection, Natural Evils, Moral Evils, Political Evils, and Religious Evils; which, I think, will comprehend most of those to which human nature is unhappily liable. And now, Sir, lest I should add one more evil to this melancholy catalogue, which is that of a long and tedious epistle, I shall reserve the examination into each of these particulars for the subject of a

future letter; and conclude this, by assuring you that I am,

SIR, &c.

LETTER II.

ON EVILS OF IMPERFECTION.

SIR,

IN pursuance of the plan proposed in my last, I shall now proceed to examine into the nature of each particular kind of evil, and in the first place of those therein denominated evils of imperfection; which are in truth no evils at all, but rather the absence of some comparative good; and therefore I shall not have occasion to detain you long on this part of my subject.

No system can possibly be formed, even in imagination, without a subordination of parts. Every animal body must have different members subservient to each other; every picture must be composed of various colours, and of light and shade; all harmony must be formed of trebles, tenors, and basses; every beautiful and useful edifice must consist of higher and lower, more and less magnificent apartments. This is in the very

very eſſence of all created things, and therefore cannot be prevented by any means whatever, unleſs by not creating them at all: for which reaſon, in the formation of the univerſe, God was obliged, in order to carry on that juſt ſubordination ſo neceſſary to the very exiſtence of the whole, to create beings of different ranks; and to beſtow on various ſpecies of animals, and alſo on the individuals of the ſame ſpecies, various degrees of underſtanding, ſtrength, beauty and perfection; to the comparative want of which advantages we give the names of folly, weakneſs, deformity, and imperfection, and very unjuſtly repute them evils; whereas in truth they are bleſſings as far as they extend, though of an inferior degree. They are no more actual evils, than a ſmall eſtate is a real misfortune, becauſe many may be poſſeſſed of greater.

Whatever we enjoy, is purely a free gift from our Creator; but that we enjoy no more, can never ſure be deemed an injury, or a juſt reaſon to queſtion his infinite benevolence. All our happineſs is owing to his goodneſs; but that it is no greater, is owing only to ourſelves, that is, to our not having any inherent right to any happineſs, or even to any exiſtence at all. This is no more to be imputed to God, than the wants of a beggar to the perſon who has relieved him: that he had ſomething, was owing to his benefactor; but that he had no more only to his original poverty.

They who look upon the privation of all the good they ſee others enjoy, or think poſſible for infinite power to beſtow, as poſitive evil, underſtand not that the univerſe is a ſyſtem whoſe very eſſence conſiſts in ſubordination; a ſcale of beings deſcending by inſenſible degrees from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing; in which though we may juſtly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we poſſibly comprehend it; yet would it be the higheſt abſurdity to hope for it in all its parts, becauſe the beauty and happineſs of the whole depend altogether on the juſt inferiority of its parts, that is, on the comparative imperfections of the ſeveral beings of which it is compoſed.

It would have been no more an inſtance of God's wiſdom to have created no beings but of the higheſt and moſt perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art to cover his whole piece with one ſingle colour the moſt beautiful he could compoſe. Had he confined himſelf to ſuch, nothing could have exiſted but demi-gods or arch-angels, and then all inferior orders muſt have been void and uninhabited: but as it is ſurely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all theſe ſhould be filled up with beings capable of enjoying happineſs themſelves, and contributing to that of others, they muſt neceſſarily be filled with inferior beings, that is, with ſuch as are leſs perfect, but from whoſe exiſtence, notwithſtanding that leſs perfection,

on, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the univerſe, than if no ſuch had been created. It is moreover highly probable, that there is ſuch a connection between all ranks and orders by ſubordinate degrees, that they mutually ſupport each other's exiſtence, and every one in its place is abſolutely neceſſary towards ſuſtaining the whole vaſt and magnificent fabric.

You ſee, therefore, that it is utterly impracticable, even for infinite power. to exclude from creation this neceſſary inferiority of ſome beings in compariſon with others. All that it can do is to make each as happy as their reſpective ſituations will permit: and this it has done in ſo extraordinary a manner, as to leave the benevolence of our great Creator not to be doubted of; for though he cannot make all ſuperior, yet in the diſpenſations of his bleſſings, his wiſdom and goodneſs both are well worthy the higheſt admiration; for, amongſt all the wide diſtinctions which he was obliged to make in the dignity and perfections of his creatures, he has made much leſs in their happineſs than is uſually imagined, or indeed can be believed from outward appearances. He has given many advantages to brutes, which man cannot attain to with all his ſuperiority, and many probably to man which are denied to angels; amongſt which his ignorance is perhaps none of the leaſt. With regard to him, though it was neceſſary to

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the great purpoſes of human life to beſtow riches, underſtanding, and health, on individuals in very partial proportions; yet has the Almighty ſo contrived the nature of things, that happineſs is diſtributed with a more equal hand. His goodneſs, we may obſerve, is always ſtriving with theſe our neceſſary imperfections, and ſetting bounds to the inconveniences it cannot totally prevent, by balancing the wants, and repaying the ſufferings of all by ſome kind of equivalent naturally reſulting from their particular ſituations and circumſtances. Thus, for example, poverty or the want of riches is generally compenſated by having more hopes and fewer fears, by a greater ſhare of health, and a more exquiſite reliſh of the ſmalleſt enjoyments than thoſe who poſſeſs them are uſually bleſſed with. The want of taſte and genius, with all the pleaſures that ariſe from them, are commonly recompenced by a more uſeful kind of common-ſenſe, together with a wonderful delight, as well as ſucceſs, in the buſy purſuits of a ſcrambling world. The ſufferings of the ſick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, ſometimes almoſt repaid by the inconceivable tranſports occaſioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, becauſe imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is ſome truth in that rant of a mad poet, that there is a pleaſure in being mad, which none but madmen know.

know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infuſing that inſenſibility which can enable them to endure the miſeries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial adminiſtered by the gracious hand of providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper education. It is the baſis of all ſubordination, the ſupport of ſociety, and the privilege of individuals; and I have ever thought it a moſt remarkable inſtance of the divine wiſdom, that whereas in all animals, whoſe individuals riſe little above the reſt of their ſpecies, knowledge is inſtinctive; in man, whoſe individuals are ſo widely different, it is acquired by education; by which means the prince and the labourer, the philoſopher and the peaſant, are in ſome meaſure fitted for their reſpective ſituations. The ſame parental care extends to every part of the animal creation. Brutes are exempted from numberleſs anxieties, by that happy want of recollection on paſt, and apprehenſion of future ſufferings, which are annexed to their inferiority. Thoſe amongſt them who devour others, are taught by nature to diſpatch them as eaſily as poſſible; and man, the moſt mercileſs devourer of all, is induced, by his own advantage, to feaſt thoſe deſigned for his ſuſtenance, the more luxurioufly to feaſt upon them

them himſelf. Thus miſery, by all poſſible methods, is diminiſhed or repaid; and happineſs, like fluids, is ever tending towards an equilibrium.

But was it ever ſo unequally divided, our pretence for complaint could be of this only, that we are not ſo high in the ſcale of exiſtence as our ignorant ambition may deſire: a pretence which muſt eternally ſubſiſt; becauſe, were we ever ſo much higher, there would be ſtill room for infinite power to exalt us; and ſince no link in the chain can be broke, the ſame reaſon for diſquiet muſt remain to thoſe who ſucceed to that chaſm, which muſt be occaſioned by our preferment. A man can have no reaſon to repine, that he is not an angel; nor a horſe, that he is not a man; much leſs, that in their ſeveral ſtations they poſſeſs not the faculties of another; for this would be an inſufferable misfortune. And doubtleſs it would be as inconvenient for a man to be endued with the knowledge of an angel, as for a horſe to have the reaſon of a man; but as they are now formed by the conſummate wiſdom of their Creator, each enjoys pleaſures peculiar to his ſituation; and though the happineſs of one may perhaps conſiſt in divine contemplation, of another in the acquiſition of wealth and power, and that of a third in wandering amongſt limpid ſtreams, and luxuriant paſtures; yet the meaneſt of theſe enjoyments give no interruption to the moſt ſublime;

ſublime, but altogether undoubtedly increaſe the aggregate ſum of felicity beſtowed upon the univerſe. Greatly indeed muſt that be leſſened, were there no beings but of the higheſt orders. Did there not, for inſtance, exiſt on this terreſtrial globe any ſenſitive creatures inferior to man, how great a quantity of happineſs muſt have been loſt, which is now enjoyed by millions, who at preſent inhabit every part of its ſurface, in fields and gardens, in extended deſarts, impenetrable woods, and immenſe oceans; by monarchies of bees, republics of ants, and innumerable families of inſects dwelling on every leaf and flower, who are all poſſeſſed of as great a ſhare of pleaſure, and a greater of innocence, than their arrogant ſovereign, and at the ſame time not a little contribute to his convenience and happineſs.

Has God, thou fool! work'd ſolely for thy good!
Thy joy, thy paſtime, thy attire, thy food!
Who for thy table feeds the wanton fawn,
For him as kindly ſpreads the flow'ry lawn.
Is it for thee the lark aſcends and ſings?
Joy tunes his voice, joy elevates his wings.
Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat?
Loves of his own, and raptures, ſwell the note.
The bounding ſteed you pompouſly beſtride,
Shares with his lord the pleaſure and the pride.
Is thine alone the ſeed that ſtrews the plain?
The birds of heav'n ſhall vindicate their grain.
Thine the full harveſt of the golden year?
Part pays, and juſtly, the deſerving ſteer.

POPE.

Thus the univerſe reſembles a large and well-regulated family, in which all the officers

cers and ſervants, and even the domeſtic animals, are ſubſervient to each other in a proper ſubordination: each enjoys the privileges and perquiſites peculiar to his place, and at the ſame time contributes by that juſt ſubordination to the magnificence and happineſs of the whole.

It is evident, therefore, that theſe evils of imperfection, proceeding from the neceſſary inferiority of ſome beings in compariſon of others, can in no ſenſe be called any evils at all; but if they could, it is as evident from thence, that there are many which even infinite power cannot prevent; it being ſufficiently demonſtrable, that to produce a ſyſtem of created beings, all ſupreme in happineſs and dignity, a government compoſed of all kings, an army of all generals, or an univerſe of all gods, muſt be impracticable for omnipotence itſelf.

We have here then made a large ſtride towards our intended goal, having at once acquitted the divine goodneſs, and freed mankind from a numerous train of imaginary evils, by moſt clearly ſhewing them to be no evils at all; and yet under this head are really comprehended all the evils we perpetually complain of, except actual pain, the nature of which, and how it came to have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good being, ſhall be conſidered in the next letter from,

SIR, &c.

LET-

LETTER III.

ON NATURAL EVILS.

SIR,

I SHALL now lay before you my free ſentiments concerning the origin of natural evils, by which I underſtand the ſufferings of ſenſitive beings only; for tempeſts, inundations, and earthquakes, with all the diſorders of the material world, are no farther evils than as they affect the ſenſitive; ſo that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind. That theſe are real evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philoſopher enough to doubt of it, I ſhall only beg leave to refer him to a ſevere fit of ſickneſs or a tedious law-ſuit, for farther ſatisfaction.

The production of happineſs ſeems to be the only motive that could induce infinite goodneſs to exert infinite power to create all things; for, to ſay truth, happineſs is the only thing of real value in exiſtence; neither riches, nor power, nor wiſdom, nor learning, nor ſtrength, nor beauty, nor virtue, nor religion, nor even life itſelf, being of any importance but as they contribute to its production. All theſe are in themſelves neither good nor evil; happineſs alone is their

their great end, and they desirable only as they tend to promote it. Most astonishing therefore it must appear to every one who looks round him, to observe all creatures blessed with life and sensation, that is, all creatures made capable of happiness, at the same time by their own natures condemned to innumerable and unavoidable miseries. Whence can it proceed, that providence should thus seem to counteract his own benevolent intentions? To what strange and invisible cause are all these numerous and invincible evils indebted for their existence? If God is a good and benevolent being, what end could he propose from creation, but the propagation of happiness? and if happiness is the end of all existence, why are not all creatures that do exist happy?

The true solution of this important question, so long and so vainly searched for by the philosophers of all ages and all countries, I take to be at least no more than this, that these real evils proceed from the same source as those imaginary ones of imperfection before treated of, namely, from that subordination, without which no created system can subsist; all subordination implying imperfection, all imperfection evil, and all evil some kind of inconvenience or suffering; so that there must be particular inconveniences and sufferings annexed to every particular rank of created beings by the circumstances of things, and their modes of existence.

Most

Moſt of thoſe to which we ourſelves are liable may be eaſily ſhewn to be of this kind, the effects only of human nature, and the ſtation man occupies in the univerſe: and therefore their origin is plainly deducible from neceſſity; that is, they could not have been prevented without the loſs of greater good, or the admiſſion of greater evils than themſelves; or by not creating any ſuch creatures as men at all. And though this, upon a general view of things, does not ſo forcibly ſtrike us, yet on a more minute inſpection into every grievance attendant on human nature, it will moſt evidently appear. Moſt of theſe, I think, may be comprehended under the following heads; poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, and death; from none of which we may venture to affirm man could ever have been exempted ſo long as he continued to be man. God indeed might have made us quite other creatures, and placed us in a world quite otherwiſe conſtituted; but then we had been no longer men; and whatever beings had occupied our ſtations in the univerſal ſyſtem, they muſt have been liable to the ſame inconveniences.

Poverty, for example, is what all could not poſſibly have been exempted from, not only by reaſon of the fluctuating nature of human poſſeſſions, but becauſe the world could not ſubſiſt without it; for had all been rich, none could have ſubmitted to the commands

mands of another, or the drudgeries of life; thence all governments muſt have been diſſolved, arts neglected, and lands uncultivated, and ſo an univerſal penury have overwhelmed all, inſtead of now and then pinching a few. Hence, by the bye, appears the great excellence of charity, by which men are enabled, by a particular diſtribution of the bleſſings and enjoyments of life, on proper occaſions, to prevent that poverty, which by a general one omnipotence itſelf could never have prevented: ſo that, by enforcing this duty, God as it were demands our aſſiſtance to promote univerſal happineſs, and to ſhut out miſery at every door, where it ſtrives to intrude itſelf.

Labour, indeed, God might eaſily have excuſed us from, ſince at his command the earth would readily have poured forth all her treaſures without our inconſiderable aſſiſtance; but if the ſevereſt labour cannot ſufficiently ſubdue the malignity of human nature, what plots and machinations, what wars, rapine, and devaſtation, what profligacy and licentiouſneſs muſt have been the conſequences of univerſal idleneſs! So that labour ought only to be looked upon as a taſk kindly impoſed upon us by our indulgent Creator, neceſſary to preſerve our health, our ſafety, and our innocence.

Inquietudes of mind cannot be prevented without firſt eradicating all our inclinations and paſſions, the winds and tides that preſerve

ſerve the great ocean of human life from perpetual ſtagnation. So long as men have purſuits, they muſt meet with diſappointments; and whilſt they have diſappointments, they muſt be diſquieted; whilſt they are injured, they muſt be inflamed with anger; and whilſt they ſee cruelties, they muſt be melted with pity; whilſt they perceive danger, they muſt be ſenſible of fear; and whilſt they behold beauty, they muſt be inſlaved by love: nor can they be exempted from the various anxieties attendant on theſe various and turbulent paſſions. Yet without them we ſhould be undoubtedly leſs happy and leſs ſafe; for without anger we ſhould not defend ourſelves, and without pity we ſhould not aſſiſt others; without fear we ſhould not preſerve our lives; and without love they would not be worth preſerving.

Pains of body are perhaps but the neceſſary conſequences of the union of material and ſpiritual eſſences; for matter being by nature diviſible, when endued with ſenſibility, muſt probably be affected by pains and pleaſures by its different modifications; wherefore, to have been freed from our ſufferings, we muſt have been deprived of all our ſenſual enjoyments; a compoſition by which few ſurely would be gainers. Beſides, the pains of our bodies are neceſſary to make us continually mindful of their preſervation; for what numberleſs lives would be loſt in every trifling purſuit, or flung away

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in ill humour, was the piercing of a ſword no more painful than the tickling of a feather.

Death, the laſt and moſt dreadful of all evils, is ſo far from being one, that it is the infallible cure for all others.

To die is landing on ſome ſilent ſhore,
Where billows never beat, nor tempeſts roar;
Ere well we feel the friendly ſtroke 'tis o'er.

GARTH.

For, abſtracted from the ſickneſs and ſufferings uſually attending it, it is no more than the expiration of that term of life God was pleaſed to beſtow on us, without any claim or merit on our part. But was it an evil ever ſo great, it could not be remedied but by much greater, which is by living for ever; by which means our wickedneſs, unreſtrained by the proſpect of a future ſtate, would grow ſo inſupportable, our ſufferings ſo intolerable by perſeverance, and our pleaſures ſo tireſome by repetition, that no being in the univerſe could be ſo completely miſerable as a ſpecies of immortal men. We have no reaſon therefore to look upon death as an evil, or to fear it as a puniſhment, even without any ſuppoſition of a future life; but if we conſider it as a paſſage to a more perfect ſtate, or a remove only in an eternal ſucceſſion of ſtill improving ſtates (for which we have the ſtrongeſt reaſons) it will then appear a new favour from the divine munificence; and a man muſt be as abſurd to repine

pine at dying, as a traveller would be, who propoſed to himſelf a delightful tour through various unknown countries, to lament that he cannot take up his reſidence at the firſt dirty inn which he baits at on the road. The inſtability of human life, or the haſty changes of its ſucceſſive periods, of which we ſo frequently complain, are no more than the neceſſary progreſs of it to this neceſſary concluſion; and are ſo far from being evils deſerving theſe complaints, that they are the ſource of our greateſt pleaſures, as they are the ſource of all novelty, from which our greateſt pleaſures are ever derived. The continual ſucceſſion of ſeaſons in the human life, by daily preſenting to us new ſcenes, render it agreeable, and, like thoſe of the year, afford us delights by their change, which the choiceſt of them could not give us by their continuance. In the ſpring of life, the gilding of the ſun-ſhine, the verdure of the fields, and the variegated paintings of the ſky, are ſo exquiſite in the eyes of infants at their firſt looking abroad into a new world, as nothing perhaps afterwards can equal. The heat and vigour of the ſucceeding ſummer of youth ripens for us new pleaſures, the blooming maid, the nightly revel, and the jovial chace. The ſerene autumn of compleat manhood feaſts us with the golden harveſts of our worldly purſuits: nor is the hoary winter of old age deſtitute of its peculiar comforts and enjoyments, of which

the recollection and relation of thoſe paſt are perhaps none of the leaſt; and at laſt death opens to us a new proſpect, from whence we ſhall probably look back upon the diverſions and occupations of this world with the ſame contempt we do now on our tops and hobby-horſes, and with the ſame ſurpriſe, that they could ever ſo much entertain or engage us.

Thus we ſee all theſe evils could never have been prevented even by infinite power, without the introduction of greater, or the loſs of ſuperior good; they are but the neceſſary conſequences of human nature; from which it can no more be diveſted than matter from extenſion, or heat from motion, which proceed from the very modes of their exiſtence.

If it be objected, that after all that has been ſaid, there are innumerable miſeries entailed upon all things that have life, and particularly on man; many diſeaſes of the body and afflictions of mind, in which nature ſeems to play the tyrant, ingenious in contriving torments for her children; that we cannot avoid ſeeing every moment with horror numbers of our fellow-creatures condemned to tedious and intolerable miſeries, ſome expiring on racks, others roaſting in flames, ſome ſtarving in dungeons, others raving in mad-houſes, ſame broiling in fevers, others groaning whole months under the exquiſite tortures of gout and ſtone: If it be ſaid further, that ſome men being exempted

empted from many calamities with which others are afflicted, proves plainly that all might have been exempted from all; the charge can by no means be diſputed, nor can it be alledged that infinite power could not have prevented moſt of theſe dreadful calamities. From hence, therefore, I am perſuaded, that there is ſomething in the abſtract nature of pain conducive to pleaſure; that the ſufferings of individuals are abſolutely neceſſary to univerſal happineſs; and that, from connections to us inconceivable, it was impracticable for omnipotence to produce the one, without at the ſame time permitting the other. Their conſtant and uniform concomitancy through every part of nature with which we are acquainted, very much corroborates this conjecture, in which ſcarce one inſtance, I believe, can be produced of the acquiſition of pleaſure or convenience by any creatures, which is not purchaſed by the previous or conſequential ſufferings of themſelves or others; pointing out, as it were, that a certain allay of pain muſt be caſt into the univerſal maſs of created happineſs, and inflicted ſomewhere for the benefit of the whole. Over what mountains of ſlain is every mighty empire rolled up to the ſummit of proſperity and luxury, and what new ſcenes of deſolation attend its fall? To what infinite toil of men, and other animals, is every flouriſhing city indebted for all the conveni-

ences and enjoyments of life, and what vice and misery do those very enjoyments introduce? The pleasures peculiar to the continuing our species are severely paid for by pains and perils in one sex, and by cares and anxieties in both. Those annexed to the preservation of ourselves are both preceded and followed by numberless sufferings; preceded by the massacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feast, and followed by as many diseases lying in wait in every dish to pour forth vengeance on their destroyers. Our riches and honours are acquired by laborious or perilous occupations, and our sports are pursued with scarce less fatigue or danger, and usually attended with distresses and destruction of innocent animals. This universal connection of pain with pleasure seems, I think, strongly to intimate, that pain abstractedly considered must have its uses; and since we may be assured, that it is never admitted but with the reluctance of the supreme author, those uses must be of the highest importance, though we have no faculties to conceive them.

The human mind can comprehend but a very small part of the great and astonishing whole; for any thing we know, the sufferings (and perhaps the crimes producing those sufferings) of the inhabitants of this terrestrial globe may some way or other affect those of the most distant planet, and the whole animal world may be connected by some

ſome principle as general as that of attraction in the corporeal, and ſo the miſeries of particular beings be ſome way neceſſary to the happineſs of the whole. How theſe things operate, is indeed to us quite inconceivable; but that they do operate in ſome ſuch extenſive manner is far, I think, from improbable.

All ages and nations ſeem to have had confuſed notions of the merits of ſufferings abſtracted from their tendency to any viſible good, and have paid the higheſt honours to thoſe who have voluntarily endured them, as to their common benefactors. Many in Chriſtian countries have formerly been ſainted for long faſting, for whipping or tormenting themſelves, for ſitting whole years in uneaſy poſtures, or expoſing themſelves to the inclemency of the weather on the tops of pillars. Many at this day in the Eaſt are almoſt deified for loading themſelves with heavy chains, bending under burthens, or confining themſelves in chairs ſtuck round with pointed nails. Now, if theſe notions are not totally devoid of all reaſon and common ſenſe, (and few, I believe are ſo which become univerſal) they can be founded on no other principle than this, of the neceſſity of pain to produce happineſs, which ſeems another weighty inſtance of the probability of this ancient and univerſal opinion, though the reaſons for it are forgot or unknown, and the practices derived from it big with the moſt abſurd and ridiculous ſuperſtitions.

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One cauſe, I think, from which many of our ſevereſt ſufferings may be derived, may be diſcovered by analogical reaſoning, that is, by aſſimilating thoſe things which are not objects of our underſtandings to others which lie within their reach. Man is one link of that vaſt chain, deſcending by inſenſible degrees, from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing. As there are many thouſands below him, ſo muſt there be many more above him. If we look downwards, we ſee innumerable ſpecies of inferior beings, whoſe happineſs and lives are dependant on his will; we ſee him cloathed by their ſpoils, and fed by their miſeries and deſtruction, inſlaving ſome, tormenting others, and murdering millions for his luxury or diverſion; is it not therefore analogous and highly probable, that the happineſs and life of man ſhould be equally dependant on the wills of his ſuperiors? As we receive great part of our pleaſures, and even ſubſiſtence, from the ſufferings and deaths of lower animals, may not theſe ſuperior beings do the ſame from ours, and that by ways as far above the reach of the moſt exalted human underſtandings, as the means by which we receive our benefits are above the capacities of the meaneſt creatures deſtined for our ſervice? The fundamental error in all our reaſonings on this ſubject, is that of placing ourſelves wrong in that preſumptuous climax of beaſt, man, and God; from whence, as we ſuppoſe falſely,

falſely, that there is nothing above us except the Supreme Being, we fooliſhly conclude that all the evils we labour under muſt be derived immediately from his omnipotent hand: whereas there may be numberleſs intermediate beings who have power to deceive, torment, or deſtroy us, for the ends only of their own pleaſure or utility, who may be veſted with the ſame privileges over their inferiors, and as much benefited by the uſe of them, as ourſelves. In what manner theſe benefits accrue to them, it is impoſſible for us to conceive; but that impoſſibility leſſens not the probability of this conjecture, which by analogy is ſo ſtrongly confirmed.

Should you, Sir, have been lately employed in reading ſome of thoſe ſublime authors, who, from pride and ignorance, delight to puff up the dignity of human nature, the notions here advanced may appear to you abſurd and incredible, becauſe inconſiſtent with that imaginary dignity; and you may object, that it is impoſſible that God ſhould ſuffer innocence to be thus afflicted, and reaſon thus deceived: that though he may permit animals, made ſolely for the uſe of man, to be thus abuſed for his convenience or recreation, yet that man himſelf, the ſole poſſeſſor of reaſon, the lord of this terreſtrial globe, his own ambaſſador, vicegerent, and ſimilitude, ſhould be thus dependant on the will of others, muſt be utterly inconſiſtent with the

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divine wiſdom and juſtice. But pray, Sir, what does all this prove, but the importance of a man to himſelf? Is not the juſtice of God as much concerned to preſerve the happineſs of the meaneſt inſect which he has called into being, as of the greateſt man that ever lived? Are not all creatures we ſee made ſubſervient to each others uſes? and what is there in man. that he only ſhould be exempted from this common fate of all created being? The ſuperiority of man to that of other terreſtrial animals is as inconſiderable, in proportion to the immenſe plan of univerſal exiſtence, as the difference of climate between the north and ſouth end of the paper I now write upon, with regard to the heat and diſtance of the ſun. There is nothing leads us into ſo many errors concerning the works and deſigns of providence, as that fooliſh vanity that can perſuade ſuch inſignificant creatures that all things were made for their ſervice; from whence they ridiculouſly ſet up utility to themſelves as the ſtandard of good, and conclude every thing to be evil which appears injurious to them or their purpoſes. As well might a neſt of ants imagine this globe of earth created only for them to caſt up into hillocks, and cloathed with grain and herbage for their ſuſtenance; then accuſe their Creator for permitting ſpades to deſtroy them, and ploughs to lay waſte their habitations; the inconveniences of which they feel, but are utterly unable to compre-

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hend their uſes, as well as the relations they themſelves bear to ſuperior beings.

It is ſurpriſing that none of thoſe philoſophers, who were drove to the ſuppoſition of two firſt cauſes, and many other abſurdities, to account for the origin of evil, ſhould not rather have choſen to impute it to the miniſtration of intermediate beings; and when they ſaw the happineſs of all inferior animals dependent on our wills, ſhould not have concluded, that the good order and well-being of the univerſe might require that ours ſhould be as dependant on the wills of ſuperior beings, accountable like ourſelves to one common lord and father of all things. This is the more wonderful, becauſe the exiſtence and influence of ſuch beings has been an article in the creed of all religions that have ever appeared in the world. In the beautiful ſyſtem of the Pagan theology, their ſilvan and houſhold deities, their nymphs, ſatyrs, and fauns, were of this kind. All the barbarous nations that have ever been diſcovered, have been found to believe and adore intermediate ſpiritual beings, both good and evil. The Jewiſh religion not only confirms the belief of their exiſtence, but of their tempting, deceiving, and tormenting mankind; and the whole ſyſtem of Chriſtianity is erected entirely on this foundation.

Thus, Sir, you ſee the good order of the whole, and the happineſs it receives from a proper ſubordination, will ſufficiently account for

for the ſufferings of individuals; and all ſuch ſhould be conſidered but as the neceſſary taxes, which every member of this great republic of the univerſe is obliged to pay towards the ſupport of the community. It is no derogation from the divine goodneſs, that theſe taxes are not always impoſed equally in the preſent ſtage of things; becauſe as every individual is but a part of the great whole, ſo is the preſent ſtate but a part of a long, or perhaps an eternal ſucceſſion of others; and, like a ſingle day in the natural life, has reference to many more both paſt and to come. It is but as a page in a voluminous accompt, from which no judgment can be formed on the ſtate of the whole; but of this we may be aſſured, that the balance will ſome time or other be ſettled with juſtice and impartiality. The certainty, therefore, of a future ſtate, in which we, and indeed all creatures endued with ſenſation, ſhall ſomehow or other exiſt, ſeems (if all our notions of juſtice are not erroneous) as demonſtrable as the juſtice of their Creator; for if he is juſt, all ſuch creatures muſt have their account of happineſs and miſery ſomewhere adjuſted with equity, and all creatures capable of virtue and vice muſt, according to their behaviour, receive rewards and puniſhments; and, to render theſe puniſhments conſiſtent with infinite goodneſs, they muſt not only be proportioned to their crimes, but alſo ſome way neceſſary

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to univerſal good; for no creatures can be called out of their primitive nothing by an all-wiſe and benevolent Creator, to be loſers by their exiſtence, or to be made miſerable for no beneficial end, even by their own miſbehaviour: ſo that all future miſery, as well as preſent, muſt be ſubſervient to happineſs, or otherwiſe infinite power, joined with infinite goodneſs, would have prevented both vice and puniſhment.

For this reaſon, amongſt all the ſhort-ſighted conjectures of man into the diſpenſations of providence and a future ſtate, the ancient doctrine of tranſmigration ſeems the moſt rational and moſt conſiſtent with his wiſdom and goodneſs; as by it all the unequal diſpenſations of things ſo neceſſary in one life, may be ſet right in another, and all creatures ſerve the higheſt and loweſt, the moſt eligible and moſt burthenſome offices of life by an equitable kind of rotation; by which means their rewards and puniſhments may not only be well proportioned to their behaviour, but alſo ſubſervient towards carrying on the buſineſs of the univerſe, and thus at the ſame time anſwer the purpoſes of both juſtice and utility. But the pride of man will not ſuffer us to treat this ſubject with the ſerioufneſs it deſerves; but rejects as both impious and ridiculous every ſuppoſition of inferior creatures ever arriving at its own imaginary dignity, allowing at the ſame time the probability of human nature

nature being exalted to the angelic, a much wider and more extraordinary tranſition, but yet ſuch a one as may probably be the natural conſequence, as well as the reward of a virtuous life; nor is it leſs likely that our vices may debaſe us to the ſervile condition of inferior animals, in whoſe forms we may be ſeverely puniſhed for the injuries we have done to mankind when amongſt them, and be obliged in ſome meaſure to repair them, by performing the drudgeries tyrannically impoſed upon us for their ſervice.

From what has been ſaid, I think, it plainly appears that numberleſs evils do actually exiſt, which could not have been excluded from the works of infinite goodneſs even by infinite power; and from hence it may be concluded, that there are none which could; but that God has exerted all his omnipotence to introduce all poſſible happineſs, and, as far as the imperfection of created things would permit, to exclude all miſery, that is, all natural evil, from the univerſal ſyſtem; which notwithſtanding will introduce itſelf in many circumſtances, even in oppoſition to infinite power.

The origin of moral evil lies much deeper, and I will venture to aſſert has never yet been fathomed by the ſhort line of human underſtanding. That I ſhall be able to reach it, I have by no means the vanity to imagine; but, laying aſide all pre-conceived opinions

opinions and ſyſtematical prejudice, I will in my next endeavour to come as near it as lies in the power of,

SIR, &c.

LETTER IV.

ON MORAL EVIL.

SIR,

I MUST now leave that plain and eaſy road through which I have hitherto conducted you, and carry you through unfrequented paths, and ways untrodden by philoſophic feet. Already, I think, the exiſtence of natural evil has been ſufficiently accounted for, without any derogation from the power, wiſdom, or goodneſs of God. What next remains to be cleared up, is the origin of moral evil; which, conſiſtently with the ſame divine attributes, I have never ſeen accounted for by any author ancient or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable ſatisfaction to a rational enquirer. Nor indeed can this be ever effectually performed, without at the ſame time taking into conſideration all thoſe moſt abſtruſe ſpeculations concerning the nature of virtue, free-will, fate, grace, and predeſtination, the debates of ages,

ages, and matter of innumerable folio's. To attempt this, therefore, in the compaſs of a letter, would be the higheſt preſumption, did not I well know the clear and ready comprehenſion of the perſon to whom it is addreſſed; and alſo that the moſt difficult of theſe kinds of diſquiſitions are uſually better explained in a few lines, than by a thouſand pages.

In order, therefore, to find out the true origin of moral evil, it will be neceſſary, in the firſt place, to enquire into its nature and eſſence; or what it is that conſtitutes one action evil, and another good. Various have been the opinions of various authors on this criterion of virtue; and this variety has rendered that doubtful, which muſt otherwiſe have been clear and manifeſt to the meaneſt capacity. Some indeed have denied that there is any ſuch thing, becauſe different ages and nations have entertained different ſentiments concerning it; but this is juſt as reaſonable as to aſſert, that there are neither ſun, moon, nor ſtars, becauſe aſtronomers have ſupported different ſyſtems of the motions and magnitudes of theſe celeſtial bodies. Some have placed it in conformity to truth, ſome to the fitneſs of things, and others to the will of God. But all this is merely ſuperficial: they reſolve us not why truth, or the fitneſs of things, are either eligible or obligatory, or why God ſhould require us to act in one manner rather than another.

another. The true reaſon of which can poſſibly be no other than this, becauſe ſome actions produce happineſs, and others miſery; ſo that all moral good and evil are nothing more than the production of the natural. This alone it is that makes truth preferable to falſhood, this that determines the fitneſs of things, and this that induces God to command ſome actions and forbid others. They who extol the truth, beauty, and harmony of virtue, excluſive of its conſequences, deal but in pompous nonſenſe; and they who would perſuade us, that good and evil are things indifferent, depending wholly on the will of God, do but confound the nature of things, as well as all our notions of God himſelf, by repreſenting him capable of willing contradictions; that is, that we ſhould be, and be happy, and at the ſame time that we ſhould torment and deſtroy each other; for injuries cannot be made benefits, pain cannot be made pleaſure, and conſequently vice cannot be made virtue by any power whatever. It is the conſequences therefore of all human actions that muſt ſtamp their value. So far as the general practice of any action tends to produce good, and introduce happineſs into the world, ſo far we may pronounce it virtuous; ſo much evil as it occaſions, ſuch is the degree of vice it contains. I ſay the general practice, becauſe we muſt always remember, in judging by this rule, to apply it only to the general

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ſpecies of actions; for the infinite wiſdom of God, deſirous to ſet bounds to the deſtructive conſequences which muſt otherwiſe have followed from the univerſal depravity of mankind, has ſo wonderfully contrived the nature of things, that our moſt vicious actions may ſometimes accidentally and collaterally produce good. Thus, for inſtance, robbery may diſperſe uſeleſs hoards to the benefit of the public; adultery may bring heirs, and good humour too, into many families, where they would otherwiſe have been wanting; and murder free the world from tyrants and oppreſſors. Luxury maintains its thouſands, and vanity its ten thouſands. Superſtition and arbitrary power contribute to the grandeur of many nations, and the liberties of others are preſerved by the perpetual contentions of avarice, knavery, ſelfiſhneſs, and ambition: and thus the worſt of vices, and the worſt of men, are often compelled by providence to ſerve the moſt beneficial purpoſes, contrary to their own malevolent tendencies and inclinations; and thus private vices become public benefits by the force only of accidental circumſtances. But this impeaches not the truth of the criterion of virtue before mentioned, the only ſolid foundation on which any true ſyſtem of ethics can be built, the only plain, ſimple, and uniform rule by which we can paſs any judgment on our actions but by this we may be enabled, not only to determine which are good and which

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are evil, but almoſt mathematically to demonſtrate the proportion of virtue or vice which belongs to each, by comparing them with the degrees of happineſs or miſery which they occaſion. But though the production of happineſs is the eſſence of virtue, it is by no means the end: the great end is the probation of mankind, or the giving them an opportunity of exalting or degrading themſelves in another ſtate by their behaviour in the preſent. And thus indeed it anſwers two moſt important purpoſes; thoſe are, the conſervation of our happineſs and the teſt of our obedience: for had not ſuch a teſt ſeemed neceſſary to God's infinite wiſdom, and productive of univerſal good, he would never have permitted the happineſs of men, even in this life, to have depended on ſo precarious a tenure as their mutual good behaviour to each other. For it is obſervable, that he who beſt knows our formation, has truſted no one thing of importance to our reaſon or virtue: he truſts only to our appetites for the ſupport of the individual, and the continuance of our ſpecies; to our vanity, or compaſſion, for our bounty to others; and to our fears for the preſervation of ourſelves; often to our vices for the ſupport of government, and ſometimes to our follies for the preſervation of our religion. But ſince ſome teſt of our obedience was neceſſary, nothing ſure could have been commanded for that end ſo fit and proper, and

at the ſame time ſo uſeful, as the practice of virtue; nothing have been ſo juſtly rewarded with happineſs, as the production of happineſs in conformity to the will of God. It is this conformity alone which adds merit to virtue, and conſtitutes the eſſential difference between morality and religion. Morality obliges men to live honeſtly and ſoberly, becauſe ſuch behaviour is moſt conducive to public happineſs, and conſequently to their own; religion, to purſue the ſame courſe, becauſe conformable to the will of their Creator. Morality induces them to embrace virtue from prudential conſiderations; religion, from thoſe of gratitude and obedience. Morality, therefore, entirely abſtracted from religion, can have nothing meritorious in it; it being but wiſdom, prudence or good œconomy, which like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God, than merits in us towards him; for though we may be juſtly puniſhed for injuring ourſelves, we can claim no reward for ſelf-preſervation; as ſuicide deſerves puniſhment and infamy, but a man deſerves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it. This I take to be the meaning of all thoſe paſſages in our ſcriptures, in which works are repreſented to have no merit without faith; that is, not without believing in hiſtorical facts, in creeds, and articles; but without being done in purſuance of our belief in God, and in obedience to his commands.

mands *. And now, having mentioned ſcripture, I cannot omit obſerving, that the Chriſtian is the only religious or moral inſtitution in the world that ever ſet in a right light theſe two material points, the eſſence and the end of virtue; that ever founded the one in the production of happineſs, that is, in univerſal benevolence, or, in their language, charity to all men; the other, in the probation of man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime and magnificent as was the philoſophy of the ancients, all their moral ſyſtems were deficient in theſe two important articles. They were all built on the ſandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or enthuſiaſtic patriotiſm; and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory; foundations which were by no means able to ſupport the mag-

* What was that faith which the author of the Chriſtian religion indiſpenſably required in all his diſciples? It could not be a literal and implicit belief of the divine inſpiration of all the books of the Old Teſtament; and conſequently of all the hiſtory, chronology, geography, and philoſophy contained in them; becauſe to theſe the Jews, who rejected it, adhered with the moſt ſuperſtitious exactneſs: it could not be the ſame kind of belief in the writings of the New Teſtament, becauſe theſe in his life-time had no exiſtence; much leſs could it conſiſt in a blind aſſent to the numberleſs explanations of theſe books, and leaſt of all in the belief of creeds, articles, and theological ſyſtems founded on ſuch explanations; for all theſe were the productions of later ages. It muſt therefore have been this, and this alone; a ſincere belief in the divine authority of his miſſion, and a conſtant practice of all moral duties from a ſenſe of their being agreeable to his commands.

nificent ſtructures which they erected upon them; for the beauty of virtue, independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonſenſe; patriotiſm, which injures mankind in general for the ſake of a particular country, is but a more extended ſelfiſhneſs, and really criminal; and all human glory but a mean and ridiculous deluſion. The whole affair then of religion and morality, the ſubject of ſo many thouſand volumes, is in ſhort no more than this: the Supreme Being, infinitely good as well as powerful, deſirous to diffuſe happineſs by all poſſible means, has created innumerable ranks and orders of beings, all ſubſervient to each other by proper ſubordination. One of theſe is occupied by man, a creature endued with a certain degree of knowledge, reaſon, and free-will, as is ſuitable to his ſituation, and placed for a time on this globe as in a ſchool of probation and education. Here he has an opportunity given him of improving or debaſing his nature, in ſuch a manner as to render himſelf fit for a rank of higher perfection and happineſs, or to degrade himſelf to a ſtate of greater imperfection and miſery; neceſſary indeed towards carrying on the buſineſs of the univerſe, but very grievous and burthenſome to thoſe individuals, who, by their own miſconduct, are obliged to ſubmit to it. The teſt of this his behaviour, is doing good, that is, co-operating with his Creator, as far as his narrow ſphere of action will permit, in the pro-

production of happineſs. And thus the happineſs and miſery of a future ſtate will be the juſt reward or puniſhment of promoting or preventing happineſs in this. So artificially by this means is the nature of all human virtue and vice contrived, that their rewards and puniſhments are woven as it were into their very eſſence; their immediate effects give us a foretaſte of their future; and their fruits in the preſent life are the proper ſamples of what they muſt unavoidably produce in another. We have reaſon given us to diſtinguiſh theſe conſequences, and regulate our conduct; and leſt that ſhould neglect its poſt, conſcience is alſo appointed as an inſtinctive kind of monitor, perpetually to remind us both of our intereſt and our duty.

When we conſider how wonderfully the practice of virtue is thus enforced by our great Creator, and that all which he requires of us under that title is only to be happy, that is, to make each other ſo; and when at the ſame time we look round us, and ſee the whole race of mankind, through every ſucceſſive generation, tormenting, injuring, and deſtroying each other, and perpetually counteracting the gracious deſigns of their maker, it is a moſt aſtoniſhing paradox how all this comes to paſs, why God ſhould ſuffer himſelf to be thus defeated in his beſt purpoſes by creatures of his own making; or why man ſhould be made with diſpoſitions to defeat

ſeat them at the expence of his own preſent and future happineſs; why infinite goodneſs ſhould form creatures inclined to oppoſe its own benevolent deſigns, or why infinite power ſhould thus ſuffer itſelf to be oppoſed.

There are ſome, I know, who extricate themſelves from this difficulty very conciſely by aſſerting, that there is in fact no ſuch original depravity, no ſuch innate propenſity to vice in human nature; but as this aſſertion is directly contrary to the expreſs declaration of the ſcriptures, to the opinion of the philoſophers and moraliſts of all ages, and to the moſt conſtant and unvariable experience of every hour, I think they no more deſerve an anſwer than they who would affirm, that a ſtone has no tendency to the center by its natural gravity, or that flame has no inclination to aſcend.

But the uſual ſolution applied to this difficulty by the ableſt philoſophers and divines, with which they themſelves, and moſt of their readers, ſeem perfectly ſatisfied, is comprehended in the following reaſoning: That man came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, both in virtue and happineſs; but it being more eligible that he ſhould be a free agent than a mere machine, God endued him with freedom of will; from the abuſe of which freedom, all miſery and ſin, that is, all natural and moral evils, derive their exiſtence; from all ſuch therefore the divine goodneſs is ſufficiently juſtified, by reaſon they

they could not be prevented without the loſs of ſuperior good; for to create men free, and at the ſame time compel them to be virtuous, is utterly impoſſible.

But whatever air of demonſtration this argument may aſſume, by whatever famed preachers it may have been uſed, or by whatever learned audiences it may have been approved, I will venture to affirm, that it is falſe in all its principles, and in its concluſion alſo; and I think it may be clearly ſhewn, that God did not make man abſolutely perfect, nor abſolutely free: nor, if he had, would this in the leaſt have juſtified the introduction of wickedneſs and miſery.

That man came perfect, that is, endued with all poſſible perfections, out of the hands of his Creator, is evidently a falſe notion derived from the philoſophers of the firſt ages, founded on their ignorance of the origin of evil, and inability to account for it on any other hypotheſis: they underſtood not that the univerſal ſyſtem required ſubordination, and conſequently comparative imperfections; nor that in the ſcale of beings there muſt be ſomewhere ſuch a creature as man with all his infirmities about him; that the total removal of theſe would be altering his very nature; and that as ſoon as he became perfect he muſt ceaſe to be man. The truth of this, I think, has been ſufficiently proved; and beſides, the very ſuppoſition of a being originally perfect, and yet capable of rendering

ing itſelf wicked and miſerable, is undoubtedly a contradiction, that very power being the higheſt imperfection imaginable.

That God made man perfectly free is no leſs falſe: men have certainly ſuch a degree of free-will as to make them accountable, and juſtly puniſhable for the abuſe of it; but abſolute and independent free-will is what, I believe, no created being can be poſſeſſed of. Our actions proceed from our wills, but our wills muſt be derived from the natural diſpoſitions implanted in us by the author of our being: wrong elections proceed from wrong apprehenſions or unruly paſſions; and theſe from our original frame or accidental education; theſe muſt determine all our actions, for we have no power to act differently, theſe previous circumſtances continuing exactly the ſame. Had God thought proper to have made all men with the ſame heads and the ſame hearts, which he has given to the moſt virtuous of the ſpecies, they would have all excelled in the ſame virtues: or had the bias implanted in human nature drawn as ſtrongly towards the good ſide, as it now apparently does towards the bad, it would have operated as ſucceſsfully, and with as little infringement on human liberty: men, as well as all other animals, are exactly fitted for the purpoſes they are deſigned for; and have inclinations and diſpoſitions given them accordingly: He who implanted patience in the lamb, obedience

dience in the horſe, fidelity in the dog, and innocence in the dove, might as eaſily have inſpired the breaſt of man with theſe and all other virtues; and then his actions would have certainly correſponded with his formation: therefore, in the ſtrict philoſophical ſenſe, we have certainly no free-will; that is, none independent of our frame, our natures, and the author of them.

But were both theſe propoſitions true, were man originally created both perfect and free, yet this would by no means juſtify the introduction of moral evil; becauſe if his perfection was immediately to be deſtroyed by his free-will, he might as well never have been poſſeſſed of the one, and much better have been prevented from making uſe of the other: let us diſpute therefore as long as we pleaſe, it muſt eternally be the ſame thing, whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge created beings originally wicked and miſerable, or gave them a power to make themſelves ſo, fore-knowing they would employ that power to their own deſtruction.

If moral evil, therefore, cannot be derived from the abuſe of free-will in man, from whence can we trace its origin? Can it proceed from a juſt, a wiſe, and benevolent God? Can ſuch a God form creatures with diſpoſitions to do evil, and then puniſh them for acting in conformity to thoſe evil diſpoſitions? Strange and aſtoniſhing indeed muſt this appear to us, who know ſo little of the uni-

univerſal plan! but it is far, I think, from being irreconcilable with the juſtice of the Supreme diſpoſer of all things: for let us but once acknowledge the truth of our firſt great propoſition, (and moſt certainly true it is) that natural evils exiſt from ſome neceſſity in the nature of things, which no power can diſpenſe with or prevent, the expediency of moral evil will, perhaps, follow on courſe: for if miſery could not be excluded from the works of a benevolent Creator by infinite power, theſe miſeries muſt be endured by ſome creatures or other for the good of the whole: and if there were none capable of wickedneſs, then they muſt fall to the ſhare of thoſe who are perfectly innocent. Here again we ſee our difficulties ariſe from our wrong notions of omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with: in the preſent inſtance it is obliged either to afflict innocence, or be the cauſe of wickedneſs; it has plainly no other option: what then could infinite wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs do in this ſituation more conſiſtent with itſelf, than to call into being creatures formed with ſuch depravity, in their diſpoſitions, as to induce many of them to act in ſuch a manner as to render themſelves proper ſubjects for ſuch neceſſary ſufferings, and yet at the ſame time endued with ſuch a degree * of reaſon and free-will as

* Some have aſſerted that there can be no degrees of free-will, but that every being muſt be abſolutely free, or poſſeſſed

as to put it in the power of every individual to eſcape them by their good behaviour: ſuch a creature is man; ſo corrupt, baſe, cruel, and wicked, as to convert theſe unavoidable miſeries into juſt puniſhments, and at the ſame time ſo ſenſible of his own depravity and the fatal conſequences of guilt, as to be well able to correct the one, and to avoid the other. Here we ſee a ſubſtantial reaſon for the depravity of man, and the admittance of moral evil in theſe circumſtances ſeems not only compatible with the juſtice of God, but one of the higheſt inſtances of his conſummate wiſdom in ordering and diſpoſing all things in the beſt manner their imperfect natures will admit.

ſeſſed of no freedom at all: and this ſeems to have been the principal error that has led thoſe who have ſupported both ſides of this queſtion into ſo many abſurdities; as it well might, ſince they were both equally wrong in eſpouſing a propoſition, which contradicts both reaſon and experience. Brutes have a certain degree of free-will; elſe why do we correct them for their miſbehaviour, or why do they amend upon correction? Yet certainly they have not ſo great a degree as ourſelves. A man raving mad is not, nor is conſidered as a free-agent; a man leſs mad has a greater portion of freedom; and a man not mad at all has the greateſt; but ſtill the degree of his freedom muſt bear a proportion to the weakneſs of his underſtanding, and the ſtrength of his paſſions and prejudices; all which are a perverſion of reaſon, and madneſs as far as they extend, and operate on free-will in the very ſame manner: ſo that it is ſo far from being true, that all men are equally free, that probably there are no two men who are poſſeſſed of exactly the ſame degree of freedom.

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I preſume not by what has been here ſaid to determine on the counſels of the Almighty, to triumph in the compleat diſcovery of the origin of moral evil, or to aſſert that this is the certain or ſole cauſe of its exiſtence; I propoſe it only as a gueſs concerning the reaſon of its admiſſion, more probable, and leſs derogatory from the divine wiſdom and juſtice, than any that has hitherto been offered for that purpoſe.

There is undoubtedly ſomething farther in the general depravity of mankind than we are aware of, and probably many great and wiſe ends are anſwered by it to us totally incomprehenſible. God, as has been ſhewn, would never have permitted the exiſtence of natural evil, but from the impoſſibility of preventing it without the loſs of ſuperior good; and on the ſame principle the admiſſion of moral evil is equally conſiſtent with the divine goodneſs: and who is he ſo knowing in the whole ſtupendous ſyſtem of nature as to aſſert, that the wickedneſs of ſome beings may not, by means unconceivable to us, be beneficial to innumerable unknown orders of others? or that the puniſhments of ſome may not contribute to the felicity of numbers infinitely ſuperior?

To this purpoſe the learned Hugenius ſays with great ſagacity, *Præterea credibile eſt, ipſa illa animi vitia magnæ hominum parti, non ſine ſummo concilio data eſſe: Cum enim Dei providentiâ talis ſit Tellus, ejuſque incolæ, quales cernimus,*

cernimus, abſurdum enim foret exiſtimare omnia hæc alia facta eſſe, quam ille voluerit, ſcieritque futura *.

But let us not forget that this neceſſity of vice and puniſhment, and its ſubſerviency to public good, makes no alteration in their natures with regard to man; for though the wiſdom of God may extract from the wickedneſs of men ſome remote benefits to the univerſe; yet that alters not the caſe with regard to them, nor in the leaſt extenuates their guilt. He has given them reaſon ſufficient to inform them, that their injuries to each other are diſpleaſing to him, and free-will ſufficient to refrain from ſuch actions, and may therefore puniſh their diſobedience without any infringement of juſtice: he knows indeed, that though none are under any compulſion to do evil, yet that they are all ſo framed, that many will certainly do it; and he knows alſo that incomprehenſible ſecret why it is neceſſary that many ſhould: but his knowledge having no relation to their determination renders not their vices leſs criminal, nor the puniſhment of them leſs equitable; for though with regard to God, vice may be perhaps the conſequence of miſery, that is, men may be inclined to vice in order to render them proper objects of ſuch a degree of miſery as was unavoidably neceſſary, and previouſly determined for the

* Coſmotheoros, Lib. 1. p. 34.

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ſake of public good, yet, in regard to man miſery is the conſequence of vice; that is, all human vices produce miſery, and are juſtly puniſhed by its infliction.

If it be objected, that this makes God the author of ſin, I anſwer, God is, and muſt be the author of every thing; and to ſay that any thing is, or happens, independent of the firſt cauſe, is to ſay that ſomething exiſts, or happens, without any cauſe at all. God is the author, if it may be ſo expreſſed, of all the natural evils in the univerſe; that is, of the feweſt poſſible in the nature of things; and why may he not be the author of all moral evil in the ſame manner, and on the ſame principle? If natural evil owes its exiſtence to neceſſity, why may not moral? If miſery brings with it its utility, why may not wickedneſs?

" If ſtorms and earthquakes break not Heav'n's deſign,
" Why then a Borgia or a Catiline?"

Wherefore it ought always to be conſidered, that, though ſin in us, who ſee no farther than the evils it produces, is evil, and juſtly puniſhable; yet in God, who ſees the cauſes and connections of all things, and the neceſſity of its admiſſion, that admiſſion may be no evil at all, and that neceſſity a ſufficient vindication of his goodneſs.

But it may be alledged that this principle totally changes the nature of vice, deſtroys

ſtroys the criterion before affixed to it, and encourages the univerſal practice of wickedneſs: for if moral evil, and the puniſhment of it, are neceſſary towards promoting univerſal good, then the more wicked men are, the more they promote that good; and the more they co-operate with their Creator in compleating his great and benevolent plan of univerſal happineſs. But this reaſoning is extremely fallacious; becauſe no collateral, remote, unknown, and undeſigned good reſulting from vice can alter the nature of it, or diveſt it of criminality; and moreover if that good ariſes only from its puniſhment, ſo far is it from an encouragement to wickedneſs, that it proves only that the puniſhment of it is neceſſary and unpreventable; nay, in its nature incapable of remiſſion, without a penal ſatisfaction from ſome being or other; nor does its co-operation with the deſigns of Providence render it leſs criminal, or leſs worthy of his juſt indignation; all hiſtories are filled with inſtances of the wickedneſs of men conſpiring to bring about the counſels of the Almighty; ſuch were the ambition and ferocity of the Romans, the obſtinacy of the Jews, the cruelty of Herod, and the treachery of Judas; yet were theſe never eſteemed for that reaſon meritorious or innocent.

From this important propoſition, that all natural evil derives its exiſtence from neceſſity, and all moral from expediency ariſing from

from that neceſſity; I ſay, from this important propoſition, well conſidered and purſued, ſuch new lights might be ſtruck out as could not fail, if directed by the hands of learning and impartiality, to lead the human mind through the unknown regions of ſpeculation, and to produce the moſt ſurpriſing and uſeful diſcoveries in ethics, metaphyſics, and in Chriſtianity too: I add Chriſtianity, becauſe it is a maſter-key, which will, I am certain, at once unlock all the myſterious and perplexing doctrines of that amazing inſtitution, and explain fairly, without the leaſt aſſiſtance from theological artifice, all thoſe abſtruſe ſpeculations of original ſin, grace, and predeſtination, and vicarious puniſhments, which the moſt learned, for want of this clue, have never yet been able to make conſiſtent with reaſon or common ſenſe.

In the firſt place, for inſtance, the doctrine * of original ſin is really nothing more than the very ſyſtem here laid down, into which we have been led by cloſely purſuing reaſon, and without which the origin of moral evil cannot be accounted for on any principle whatever. Indeed, according to the

* Original ſin is a contradiction in terms; original ſignifying innate, and ſin the act of an accountable being: by this expreſſion, therefore, of original ſin cannot be meant original or innate guilt, for that is abſolute nonſenſe, but only an original depravity, or an innate diſpoſition to ſin.

common

common notions of the abſolute omnipotence of God, and the abſolute free-will in man, it is moſt abſurd and impious, as it repreſents the Deity voluntarily bringing men into being with depraved diſpoſitions, tending to no good purpoſes, and then arbitrarily puniſhing them for the ſins which they occaſion with torments which anſwer no ends, either of their reformation or utility to the univerſe: but when we ſee, by the foregoing explanation, the difficulties with which Omnipotence was environed, and that it was obliged by the neceſſity of natural evils to admit moral, all theſe abſurdities at once vaniſh, and the original depravity of man appears fairly conſiſtent with the juſtice and even goodneſs of his Creator.

The doctrines of predeſtination and grace as ſet forth in the ſcriptures, on the moſt impartial interpretation, I take to be theſe: that ſome men come into the world with diſpoſitions ſo extremely bad, that God foreknows that they will certainly be guilty of many crimes, and in conſequence be puniſhed for them; that to others he has given better diſpoſitions, and moreover protects them from vice by a powerful but inviſible influence, in the language of thoſe writings called grace: this ſcheme has appeared to many ſo partial and unjuſt, that they have totally rejected it, and endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to explain it quite out of the bible, in contradiction to all the ſenſe of

language, and the whole tenour of thoſe writings: and indeed, on the old plan of God's abſolute omnipotence, uncontrouled by any previous neceſſity, in the nature of things, to admit both natural and moral evil, it is highly derogatory from his wiſdom and goodneſs; but, on the ſuppoſition of that previous neceſſity, there appears nothing incredible in it, nor the leaſt inconſiſtent with divine juſtice; becauſe if God was obliged by the nature of things, and for the good of the whole, to ſuffer ſome to be wicked, and conſequently miſerable, he certainly might protect others both from guilt and puniſhment. He in this light may be compared to the commander of a numerous army, who, though he is obliged to expoſe many to danger, and ſome to deſtruction, yet protects others with ramparts and covert-ways; but ſo long as he exerciſes this power for the good of the whole, theſe diſtinctions amongſt individuals ought never to be imputed to partiality or injuſtice.

The doctrine* of ſacrifice, or vicarious puniſhment, is the moſt univerſal, and yet, excluſive of this plan, the moſt abſurd of all

* If the puniſhments of the wicked ſerve not ſome ends with which we are unacquainted, the ſufferings of the innocent can poſſibly bear no manner of relation to them; and conſequently the words Sacrifice, Atonement, Propitiation, and Vicarious Puniſhments, can no more have any ideas affixed to them than the ringing of a bell or the blowing of a trumpet, but are mere ſounds, without any meaning at all.

religious

religious tenets that ever entered into the mind of man; ſo abſurd is it, that how it came to be ſo univerſal is not eaſy to be accounted for: Pagans, Jews, and Chriſtians, have all agreed in this one point, though differing in all others; and have all treated it as a ſelf-evident principle, that the ſins of one creature might be atoned for by the ſufferings of another: but from whence they derived this ſtrange opinion, none of them have pretended to give any account, or to produce in its defence the leaſt ſhadow of a reaſon; for that there ſhould be any manner of connection between the miſeries of one being and the guilt of another; or that the puniſhing the innocent, and excuſing the guilty, ſhould be a mark of God's deteſtation of ſin; or, that two acts of the higheſt injuſtice ſhould make one of juſtice, is ſo fundamentally wrong, ſo diametrically oppoſite to common ſenſe, and all our ideas of juſtice, that it is equally aſtoniſhing that ſo many ſhould believe it themſelves or impoſe it upon others. But on the foregoing theory this alſo may be a little cleared up, and will by no means appear ſo very inconſiſtent with reaſon: for if a certain quantity of miſery in ſome part of the univerſal ſyſtem is neceſſary to the happineſs and well-being of the whole; and if this neceſſity ariſes from its anſwering ſome purpoſes incomprehenſible to the human underſtanding; I will aſk any impartial reaſoner, why the ſufferings of

one being may not anſwer the ſame ends, or be as effectual towards promoting univerſal good, as the ſufferings of another? If the miſeries of individuals are to be looked upon as taxes which they are obliged to pay towards the ſupport of the public, why may not the ſufferings of one creature ſerve the ſame purpoſes, or abſolve as much of that neceſſary tax, as the ſufferings of another, and on that account be accepted as a payment or ſatisfaction for their ſufferings; that is, for the ſufferings due to the public utility from the puniſhment of their crimes, without which the happineſs of the whole could not ſubſiſt, unleſs they ſhould be replaced by the ſufferings of others? As we are entirely ignorant why miſery has any exiſtence at all, or what intereſt it ſerves in the general ſyſtem of things, this may poſſibly be the caſe, for any thing we know; and that it is not, I am certain no one can affirm with reaſon: reaſon indeed cannot inform us that it is ſo, but that it may be, is undoubtedly no contradiction to reaſon.

If I miſtake not, it might be ſhewn, that this principle of the neceſſity of moral evil, and its puniſhment, is the foundation on which the whole fabric of the Chriſtian diſpenſation is erected; the principle itſelf is avowed by the author of that diſpenſation in clear and expreſs words: *It muſt needs be*, ſays he, *that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.* That is, it is neceſ-

ſary

ſary towards compleating the deſigns of providence, that ſome men ſhould commit crimes; but as no individual is compelled by neceſſity to commit them, woe unto all who are thus guilty. He came, by his excellent precepts and example, to diminiſh the quantity of moral evil in the world, and of miſery conſequential from its puniſhment, but found it neceſſary to replace that miſery in ſome degree by his own voluntary and unmerited ſufferings; and perhaps the unparalleled tortures inflicted on his diſciples and followers might be alſo neceſſary and ſubſervient to the ſame purpoſes.

From what has been here ſaid, I think it is evident that the origin of evil is by no means ſo difficult to account for as at firſt ſight it appears; for it has been plainly ſhewn that moſt of thoſe we uſually complain of are evils of imperfection, which are rather the abſence of comparative advantages than poſitive evils, and therefore, properly ſpeaking, no evils at all; and as ſuch, ought to be entirely ſtruck out of the catalogue. It has likewiſe been made appear, that of natural evils, which are the ſufferings of ſenſitive beings, many are but the conſequences naturally reſulting from the particular circumſtances of particular ranks in the ſcale of exiſtence, which could not have been omitted without the deſtruction of the whole; and that many more are in all probability neceſſary, by means to us incomprehenſible,

to

to the production of universal good. Lastly, it has been suggested, that from this necessity of natural evils, may arise the expediency of moral, without which those necessary sufferings must have been with less justice inflicted on perfect innocence; and moreover, that it is probable moral evil, as well as natural, may have some ultimate tendency to the good of the whole; and that the crimes and punishments of some beings may, by some means or other, totally beyond the reach of our narrow capacities, contribute to the felicity of much greater numbers.

This plan, Sir, I am persuaded is not far distant from the truth; and on this foundation, if I mistake not, a system of morality and religion, more compleat and solid, more consistent with reason, and with Christianity too, might be erected than any which has yet appeared: I heartily wish that some person of more learning, abilities, and leisure than myself, (and much more, I am sure, of all it would require) encouraged by your favour, and assisted by your sagacity, would undertake it, and condescend to fill up these out-lines so inaccurately sketched out by,

SIR, &c.

LET-

LETTER V.

ON POLITICAL EVILS.

SIR,

ACCORDING to my propoſed plan there ſtill remain two ſorts of evils to be accounted for, political and religious; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with ſo abſtruſe and unentertaining a correſpondence) I ſhall endeavour to ſhew you, that it is utterly impoſſible, even for omnipotence itſelf, to give a perfect government, or a perfect religion to an imperfect creature; and therefore, that the numberleſs imperfections inherent in all human governments and religions are not imputable to God, nor any defect of power, wiſdom, or goodneſs in him: but only to the inferiority of man's ſtation in the univerſe, which neceſſarily expoſes him to natural and moral evils, and muſt, for the ſame reaſon, to political and religious; which are indeed but the conſequences of the other. Superior beings may probably form to themſelves, or receive from their Creator, government without tyranny or corruption, and religions without deluſions or abſurdities; but man cannot: God indeed may remove him into ſo exalted a ſociety; but whilſt he continues to be man, he

he muſt be ſubject to innumerable evils; amongſt which thoſe I call political and religious are far from being the leaſt.

But as theſe two kinds of evils are very different, they will require different conſiderations; I ſhall therefore in the preſent confine myſelf to the political only; by which I mean all thoſe grievous burthens of tyranny and oppreſſion, of violence and corruption, of war and deſolation, under which all ages and nations have ever groaned on account of government: little leſs deſtructive perhaps to the happineſs of mankind, than even anarchy itſelf; but which, notwithſtanding, are ſo woven into the very eſſence of all human governments from the depravity of man, that without them none can be either eſtabliſhed, maintained, or adminiſtered, nor conſequently can they be prevented without changing that depravity into perfection; that is, without a compleat alteration in human nature. How this comes to paſs may be eaſily explained by a ſhort examination, firſt into the nature and origin of government in general, and afterwards into thoſe of particular forms and policies; than which nothing has been more commonly miſunderſtood and miſrepreſented.

As to government in general, it is no wonder that it is ſo productive of evil, ſince its very nature conſiſts of power truſted in the hands of ſuch imperfect and vicious creatures as men, and exerciſed over others as im-

imperfect and vicious as themſelves; in which there muſt be pride, avarice, and cruelty on one ſide; envy, ignorance, and obſtinacy on the other; and injuſtice and ſelf-intereſt on both. Its origin alſo ariſes from the ſame impure ſource of human imperfection; that is, men being neither wiſe nor honeſt enough to purſue their common or mutual intereſts without compulſion, are obliged to ſubmit to ſome, in order to ſecure their lives and properties from the depredations of all: but though this neceſſity drives them into ſome kind of government, yet it can never decide who ſhall govern, becauſe all men being by nature equal, every one has an equal right to this ſuperiority: this therefore, can be determined only by more imperfections; that is, by the ſtruggles of ambition, treachery, violence, and corruption; from ſucceſs in which univerſal ſcramble are derived all the mighty empires of the earth: one man at firſt, by ſome of theſe methods, acquiring the command over a few, then by their aid extending his power over great numbers, and at laſt, by the aſſiſtance of thoſe numbers, united by the advantage of plundering others, ſubduing all oppoſition: and thus we ſee all human government is the offſpring of violence and corruption, and muſt inherit the imperfection of both its parents. It is plain alſo that national governments can never be ſupported by any other methods than thoſe by which they were at firſt

firſt raiſed; for being all independent of each other, and retaining ſtill their original inclination to devour each other; and having no ſuperior tribunal to refer to for juſtice, they can have no means to ſecure their own poſſeſſions, or to repel their mutual encroachments, but by force, which is called the right of war; that is, the right of doing all the wrong that lies in their power; for war, however dignified with honours and encomiums by conquerors and their flatterers, is in fact nothing elſe but robbery and murder. Nations having no more right to plunder each other than pariſhes, nor men to kill one another in their political than in their private capacities.

If we look into the internal conſtitutions of all theſe governments, we ſhall find likewiſe, that they muſt be adminiſtered by the ſame violence and corruption to which they are indebted for their origin; that is, by hiring one part of the ſociety to force the other into ſubjection; and that none of them ever ſubſiſted any longer than whilſt the ſtronger part, not always the moſt numerous, found it for their advantage to keep the weaker in obedience; for it ſhould be ever remembered, as the fundamental of all politics, that men will never ſubmit to each other merely for the ſake of public utility *, too

* If any one is ſo ignorant of human nature, as to fancy that they will, let him make the experiment in a ſingle pariſh,

too remote a benefit to make any impreſſion on the dull ſenſes of the multitude; but muſt be always beat or bribed into obedience. Higher orders of beings may ſubmit to each other on nobler motives, from their ſenſe of virtue or of univerſal benefit; but man can be governed by nothing but the fear of puniſhment or the hopes of reward; that is, by ſelf-intereſt, the great principle that operates in the political world in the ſame manner that attraction does in the natural, preſerving order and reſtraining every thing to its proper courſe by the continual endeavours of every individual to draw all power and property to himſelf*.

If we deſcend to the examination of particular forms of government, we ſhall ſee them all exactly correſpond with this general plan; we ſhall find that none of them owe their origin to patriarchal power, the

pariſh, and there, if without power or compulſion, intereſt or gratuity, ſolely by the ſtrength of reaſon, and motives of public advantage, he can perſuade the inhabitants to ſubmit to equal and neceſſary taxes, to repair roads, build bridges, incloſe commons, drain marſhes, employ their poor, or perform any works of general utility; if he can accompliſh this, let him retain his opinion; but if he finds it utterly impracticable, let him not expect that it can ever be done in a whole nation, in which there are ſo many more factions, intereſts, and abſurdities to contend with.

* There is indeed one other method of government frequently made uſe of by the moſt illuſtrious princes and legiſlators, that is, fraud; but as this operates only by the appearance of ſelf-intereſt, it may properly be comprehended under that head.

divine right of princes, or the uninfluenced choice of the people; things which never exiſted but in the idle dreams of viſionary politicians; but all to the ſtruggles of ambition and ſelf-intereſt, ſubſiding at laſt into ſome kind of policy; either into abſolute monarchy, or ſome ſpecies of popular government more or leſs remote from it, as the different parts of it have had ſtrength or fortune to prevail; all which muſt be carried on by the ſame vicious methods of violence or corruption, and conſequently be productive of numberleſs, if not of equal, evils.

In abſolute monarchies, for inſtance, great violence muſt be exerciſed to keep men, by nature equal, in ſo unnatural a ſubjection; this muſt produce plots, rebellions, civil wars, and maſſacres; and theſe muſt require more violence to repreſs them; but this violence cannot be uſed without much corruption; for it is not the perſon of the ſovereign, his crown and ſcepter, that can preſerve his authority, nor can he deſtroy thouſands with his own hand, like a hero in a romance; a powerful army muſt be kept in pay to enſlave the people, and a numerous clergy to deceive them*; whoſe ambition,

* It has been repreſented as if the author by this deſigned to inſinuate, that the whole buſineſs of the clergy was to deceive the people; than which nothing can be more diſtant from his intentions: all that he means is, that men will not eaſily ſubmit to tyranny unleſs their conſciences are firſt enſlaved; or that popery is the moſt effectual ſupport of arbi-

bition, avarice, luxury, and cruelty muſt be ſatiated with the blood and treaſures of that very people as a reward for their ſervices: hence infinite evils muſt ariſe, the lives, liberties, and properties of all muſt be dependent on the capricious will of one, or what is worſe, on the wills of his pimps, flatterers, and favourites: juſtice muſt be perverted by favour and that favour, can ſeldom be obtained but by adulation, ſervility, and treachery; this produces all kinds of moral evils, and theſe beget more political.

In democratical governments, if there is leſs violence there is more corruption; which in theſe indeed is the baſis of all power, and productive of the moſt miſchievous effects; here all things are at the diſpoſal of an ignorant and giddy multitude, always led to their own deſtruction by the flimſy eloquence and pretended patriotiſm of knaves, fools, and enthuſiaſtic madmen; or commonly of ſome extraordinary genius, formed for popularity by a lucky compoſition of all theſe excellent ingredients; all ſubordination is ſubverted; and the moſt inſolent and vicious of the people muſt be careſſed, bribed, and intoxicated, and by that means rendered ſtill more inſolent and vicious; and all who by theſe methods acquire their favour, muſt be no leſs vicious than themſelves. If in deſpo-

arbitrary power; a propoſition which he ſuppoſes no one will preſume to contradict.

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tic governments power cannot be attained but by ſervility and adulation, in democratical it can never be acquired but by the more pernicious vices of turbulence and faction; for which reaſon theſe are ever ſure to be governed by the moſt wicked, ambitious, avaricious and miſchievous of their members.

Mixed governments, though perhaps productive of fewer evils than either of the former, yet muſt neceſſarily partake of thoſe belonging to both, and be ſupported by more or leſs violence, as they more or leſs approach the deſpotic; or of corruption, as they come nearer to the democratical principles: the further they ſhrink from the iron ſcourges of the one, the more will they be entangled in the golden fetters of the other; for corruption muſt always increaſe in due proportion to the decreaſe of arbitrary power; ſince where there is leſs power to command obedience, there muſt be more bribery to purchaſe it, or there can be no government at all. Theſe have, beſides, many evils peculiar to themſelves, the very excellence of theſe ſort of conſtitutions being productive of inconveniencies: for this excellence conſiſting principally in this, that their different parts are able to counteract each others miſchievous intentions, the reins of government are kept tight only by each pulling a different way, and they ſubſiſt by a perpetual contention, like a body kept alive by

by the oppoſite effects of contrary poiſons: a very precarious and uneaſy kind of exiſtence! This expoſes them in ſome meaſure to all the evils incident to both abſolute and popular governments, though in a leſs degree; to the oppreſſion of the one, and the licentiouſneſs of the other, to factions at home, weakneſs abroad, and infinite expence in all parts of their adminiſtration: yet are theſe mixed conſtitutions the very beſt that human wiſdom could ever diſcover for the regulation of human ſocieties.

All theſe evils ariſe from the nature of things and the nature of man, and not from the weakneſs or wickedneſs of particular men, or their accidental aſcendency in particular governments: the degrees of them may indeed be owing to theſe, but their exiſtence is immutable. So long as the imperfection of human nature continues, ſo long will princes, for the moſt part, convert that power with which they are truſted for the ſake of public utility, to the ignoble ends of their own avarice, luxury, or ambition; ſo long will the people prefer preſent ſelf-intereſt to remote benefits ariſing from national proſperity; and ſo long will corrupt miniſters employ this popular venality to their own private advantage; and how many ſoever are lopt off,

Non deficit aureus alter.

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It is the miſapprehenſion of this that is the fundamental error of all ignorant but well meaning ſpeculative politicians *, of all others the moſt untractable in government, and miſchievous in buſineſs, the engines with which knaves work, and the ladders on which they mount to preferment; who endeavour to deſtroy all governments, becauſe they are not perfect; and oppoſe all adminiſtrations, becauſe they cannot govern men by ſuch means as they are not deſigned or formed to be governed by; who by a Syſiphæan kind of politics, are ever labouring to roll up a ſtone that muſt recoil upon them; and to render that faultleſs, which infinite power and wiſdom cannot exempt from inconveniencies, abuſes, and imperfections,

Should one enumerate all of this kind, which cannot be excluded from government without the total alteration of human nature,

* It is a ſtrange, but a certain truth, that in politics moſt principles ſpeculatively right are practically wrong: to give a few inſtances of this kind out of many commonly adopted; viz. that thoſe who are poſſeſſed of moſt property will fight beſt in its defence; that national buſineſs is moſt ſucceſsfully carried on by aſſemblies of men uninfluenced and unconnected; that unbounded liberty, civil and eccleſiaſtical, is moſt conducive to public happineſs and virtue: all theſe propoſitions have reaſon on their ſide, but experience againſt them; they all captivate vulgar minds, becauſe they look like truth; and they look like truth, becauſe they would be true if mankind in general acted upon honeſt or even upon rational principles; but as in fact they do neither, they are utterly falſe, and all political ſtructures built on ſuch unſtable foundations will inevitably fall to the ground.

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they would be endleſs; to inſtance but a few: all political bodies, like the natural, muſt have the ſeeds of their own diſſolution ſown in their very eſſence, and like them be deſtroyed by every exceſs; by exceſs of poverty or riches, of ſlavery or liberty, of ignorance or knowledge, of adverſity or proſperity; a ſtrong proof of their imperfection, that they cannot bear exceſs even of the greateſt good; and yet they cannot be formed of more durable materials, ſo long as they are conſtituted of human creatures. All power truſted in the hands of ſo imperfect a creature as man muſt be pernicious and oppreſſive; and yet ſomewhere ſuch power muſt be truſted. All human laws muſt be liable to miſconſtruction and uncertainty; yet without laws property cannot be ſecured. All popular elections muſt be attended with corruption, licentiouſneſs, and the perverſion of juſtice; yet without them the liberty of no country can be preſerved. All national proviſions for the poor muſt not only be encouragements to idleneſs, but productive of conteſts, and often times of cruelty; yet without ſuch many honeſt but unfortunate people muſt inevitably periſh. All religious teſts and ſubſcriptions are in their own natures ſubverſive of truth and morals; yet the folly of one part of mankind, and the knavery of the other, will ſcarcely permit any government to ſubſiſt without them. Trade and wealth are the ſtrength and the

purſuit of every wiſe nation; yet theſe muſt certainly produce luxury, which no leſs certainly muſt produce their deſtruction. All war is a complication of all manner of evils natural and moral, that is, of miſery and wickedneſs; yet without it national contentions can never be determined. No government can be carried on, nor ſubordination preſerved, without forms and ceremonials, pomp and parade; yet all ſuch, from the inferiority of human nature giving itſelf airs of grandeur and magnificence, and the deſpicable expedients it is obliged to have recourſe to, to ſupport it, muſt always have ſomething mean and ridiculous in them to exalted underſtandings. All governments are in a great meaſure upheld by abſurd notions infuſed into the minds of the people, of the divine right of ſome particular perſon or family to reign over them; a fooliſh partiality for ſome particular ſpot of ground; an outrageous zeal for ſome religion which they cannot underſtand, or a ſenſeleſs purſuit of glory which they can never attain: theſe are all falſe principles; yet without them, or ſome like them, no nation can long ſubſiſt: they can never be defended by reaſon, yet reaſon can produce no others that can ſupply their places. Every flouriſhing nation endeavours to improve arts, and cultivate reaſon and good ſenſe; yet if theſe are extended too far, or too univerſally diffuſed, no national government or national religion

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can long ſtand their ground; for it is with old eſtabliſhments as with old houſes, their deformities are commonly their ſupports, and theſe can never be removed without endangering the whole fabric. In ſhort no government can be adminiſtered without in ſome degree deceiving the people, oppreſſing the mean, indulging the great, corrupting the venal, oppoſing factions to each other, and temporiſing with parties.

It is this neceſſity for evil in all government, which gives that weight and popularity, which uſually attends all thoſe who oppoſe and calumniate any government whatever; appearing always to have reaſon on their ſide, becauſe the evils of all power are conſpicuous to the meaneſt capacity; whereas the neceſſity for thoſe evils are perceivable only to ſuperior underſtandings. Every one can feel the burden of taxes and ſee the inconveniences of armies, places and penſions that muſt encreaſe them; but very few are able to comprehend, that no government can be ſupported without them in a certain degree; and that the more liberty any nation enjoys, the greater muſt be their number and neceſſity. The moſt ignorant can perceive the miſchiefs that muſt ariſe from corrupt miniſters and venal parliaments; but it requires ſome ſagacity to diſcern that aſſemblies of men unconnected by ſelf-intereſt, will no more draw together in the buſineſs of the public, than horſes without har-

neſs or bridles; but like them, inſtead of being quietly guided in the right road of general utility, will immediately run riot, ſtop the wheels of government, and tear all the political machine to pieces.

From hence it comes to paſs that all ignorant wrongheaded people naturally run in oppoſition and faction, whilſt the wiſe man knows that theſe evils cannot be eradicated, and that their exceſs only can be prevented; that thus far every honeſt man will endeavour to his utmoſt, but to proceed farther only fools will hope for, or knaves pretend. He knows that numbers of men muſt always act in the ſame manner, if in the ſame circumſtances; that politics are a ſcience as reducible to certainty as mathematics, and in them effects as invariably follow their cauſes; that the operations of will are as uniform as thoſe of matter and motion; and that though the actions of individuals are contingencies, thoſe of numbers are conſtant and invariable; that, though a ſingle man may poſſibly prefer public utility to private advantage, it is utterly impoſſible, that the majority of numerous bodies ſhould be actuated by the ſame generous and patriotic principles*; theſe can ſpring only from virtue and wiſ-

* This may be demonſtrated by a familiar inſtance: It is by no means uncommon for a ſingle die to come up a ſix, although the odds againſt it are five to one; but that a majority of five hundred dice ſhould at the ſame time come up ſix's

wiſdom, benevolent hearts, and comprehenſive underſtandings; which being the portion but of a few more exalted individuals, can never be found in the multitude to be governed: nor can they be beſtowed in any extraordinary degree on thoſe who govern, who would thereby be rendered unfit for their occupations: ſtateſmen and miniſters, who muſt be hackneyed in the ways of men, cannot be made of ſuch pure and refined materials; peculiar muſt be the compoſition of that little creature called a *Great Man.* He muſt be formed of all kinds of contradictions: he muſt be indefatigable in buſineſs, to fit him for the labours of his ſtation, and at the ſame time fond of pleaſures, to enable him to attach many to his intereſts, by a participation of their vices: he muſt be maſter of much artifice and knavery, his ſituation requiring him to employ, and be employed by, ſo many knaves; yet he muſt have ſome honeſty, or thoſe very knaves will be unwilling to truſt him: he muſt be

ſix's is ſcarcely within the power of fortune; becauſe the odds againſt each individual become almoſt infinite when operating upon the whole five hundred together. For the ſame reaſon, ſuppoſing every ſixth man to be wiſe, honeſt, and public-ſpirited, which ſurely in any country is a very liberal allowance, there would not be the ſmalleſt probability that the majority of any five hundred to be choſen out of the whole, would be of that ſort, though elected with the utmoſt impartiality; but if ambition, ſelf-intereſt, and corruption interfere in the choice, as they moſt infallibly will, theſe will render it totally impoſſible.

poſſeſſed of great magnanimity perpetually to confront ſurrounding enemies and impending dangers; yet of great meanneſs, to flatter thoſe enemies, and ſuffer tamely continual injuries and abuſes; he muſt be wiſe enough to conduct the great affairs of mankind with ſagacity and ſucceſs, and to acquire riches and honours for his reward; and at the ſame time fooliſh enough to think it worth a wiſe man's while to meddle with ſuch affairs at all, and to accept of ſuch imaginary rewards for real ſufferings. Since then in all human governments ſuch muſt the governors, and ſuch the governed eternally be, it is certain they muſt be ever big with numberleſs imperfections, and productive of abundant evils: and it is no leſs plain, that if infinite goodneſs could not exclude natural and moral evils, infinite power can never prevent political.

I hope, Sir, the picture I have here drawn of human nature and human government, will not appear to you too much of the caricature kind: your experience in both muſt inform you that it is like, though your good nature may incline you to be ſorry that it is ſo. I truſt likewiſe to your good ſenſe to diſtinguiſh, that what has here been ſaid of their imperfections and abuſes, is by no means intended as a defence of them, but meant only to ſhew their neceſſity: to this every wiſe man ought quietly to ſubmit, endeavouring at the ſame time to redreſs them

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to the utmoſt of his power; which can be effected by one method only; that is, by a reformation of manners: for as all political evils derive their original from moral, theſe can never be removed, until thoſe are firſt amended. He, therefore, who ſtrictly adheres to virtue and ſobriety in his conduct, and enforces them by his example, does more real ſervice to a ſtate than he who diſplaces a bad miniſter, or dethrones a tyrant; this gives but a temporary relief, but that exterminates the cauſe of the diſeaſe. No immoral man then can poſſibly be a true patriot; and all thoſe who profeſs outrageous zeal for the liberty and proſperity of their country, and at the ſame time infringe her laws, affront her religion, and debauch her people, are but deſpicable quacks, by fraud or ignorance increaſing the diſorders they pretend to remedy: as ſuch, I know, they have always appeared to your ſuperior judgment, and ſuch they are ever eſteemed by,

SIR, &c.

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LETTER VI.

ON RELIGIOUS EVILS.

SIR,

I NOW come to my laſt head of evils, which I call religious; by which I mean all that madneſs and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen under the name of religion; together with all thoſe perſecutions, maſſacres, and martyrdoms, which ſome have been induced to inflict, and others to ſuffer, from an enthuſiaſtic zeal for thoſe errors and abſurdities: evils of the moſt enormous ſize, and which of all others are the moſt difficult to be accounted for, as their exiſtence ſeems moſt inconſiſtent with infinite goodneſs, and moſt eaſily preventable by infinite power. For though human nature could not be exempted from natural and moral evil (as has been ſhewn) even by omnipotence, yet one would think a far leſs degree of power might have been ſufficient to have defended it from religious; by imparting to mankind a true, rational, and explicit ſyſtem of theology and ethics; by which means all the abſurdities of falſe religions, and all the calamities flowing from thoſe abſurdities, would have been effectually prevented. Wonderful, therefore, muſt

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it appear, ſince the happineſs of men, through every part of their exiſtence, ſo much depends on their religion, that it is, on their entertaining right notions of God and his attributes, of their duty to him, and their behaviour to each other; moſt wonderful, I ſay, and aſtoniſhing it muſt appear, that a wiſe and benevolent Creator ſhould ſo far have deſerted his creatures on this important occaſion, as to have ſuffered them, through all generations, to have wandered amidſt ſuch perilous precipices in the dark; or if at any time he has vouchſafed them any ſupernatural light, that it ſhould have been ſo faint and glimmering that it has rather ſerved to terrify them with the gloomy proſpect of their danger, than to enable them to avoid it.

If we look back as far as hiſtory will carry us, we ſhall find all ages and nations practiſing, under the name of religion, ſuch inhuman, obſcene, ſtupid, and execrable idolatries, that it would diſgrace human nature but to enumerate them; we ſhall ſee the wiſeſt men of the wiſeſt countries conſulting oracles of wood and ſtone, and confiding in the fooliſh ſuperſtition of the flight of birds, the entrails of beaſts, and the pecking of chickens; we ſhall ſee them butchering their innocent herds and flocks as an atonement for their vices, and ſacrificing their enemies, their ſlaves, their children, and ſometimes themſelves, to appeaſe the wrath of their imaginary

imaginary deities, of whoſe worſhip no cruelty was too horrid to be made a part; and by whoſe infamous examples no wickedneſs was too execrable to be patroniſed. At length Chriſtianity appeared; a ſketch of morality the moſt rational, and of religion the moſt ſublime the world had ever ſeen; which if ever God condeſcended to reveal his will to man, undoubtedly makes the faireſt pretenſions to be that revelation; and indeed, if we ſeriouſly conſider its internal excellence, the reaſonableneſs of its morality, the ſublimity of its theology, that it alone has fixed the right criterion of virtue, alone diſcovered the magnanimity of forgiveneſs; that its notions of the deity, his attributes and diſpenſations, are ſo unlike all that ever entered into the heads of the wiſeſt philoſophers of preceding ages, and yet ſo well confirmed by the learned diſcoveries of all ſucceeding times; ſo far exalted above all human reaſon, and yet ſo conſonant with it, and what is moſt concluſive, ſo infinitely above the capacities of thoſe who publiſhed them to the world; if we add to this its obſcure riſe and amazing progreſs, I think, we can ſcarcely doubt but that there muſt be ſomething ſupernatural in it: and yet, with all theſe marks of divinity ſtamped upon it, far from anſwering that idea of perfection which we might expect from the divine interpoſition, it was but a ſketch, whoſe out-lines indeed

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appear the work of a conſummate maſter, but filled up from time to time by unequal and injudicious hands. It had many defects in its inſtitution, and was attended with many and great evils in its conſequences; in its inſtitution it wanted univerſality, authenticity *, perſpicuity †, and policy ‡, and in

* By want of authenticity, is here meant only the want of that demonſtrable and infallible authority, of which all hiſtorical facts are in their own nature incapable; and which, had the friends of the Chriſtian revelation never pretended to beſtow upon it, the truth of that event had been no more diſputed, than the truth of any other well-atteſted hiſtory whatſoever.

† The want of perſpicuity in this revelation, needs ſurely no other teſtimony than the millions of writers, who, for ſeventeen centuries, have laboured to demonſtrate, harmoniſe, ſyſtemiſe, illuſtrate, and explain every one of its doctrines; and the no leſs numberleſs and various opinions that remain to this day concerning them all: much indeed of this obſcurity has proceeded from men's endeavours to make it what they fancied it ſhould have been, but for which it was never intended; that is, a regular, clear, and explicit body of moral and political inſtitutes.

‡ By policy is here meant all inſtitutions and regulations of human government, both civil and eccleſiaſtical; concerning which the author of the Chriſtian religion has carefully avoided giving any directions. All theſe he has left to be ordered by every ſtate in ſuch a manner as ſhall appear to them moſt convenient, and has commanded his diſciples to be ſubject, as men, to their ordinances, *not only for wrath, but for conſcience ſake;* but foreſeeing the infinite miſchiefs that muſt ariſe from truſting human creatures with a divine power, he has forbid them, as Chriſtians, either to exerciſe, or ſubmit to, any authority over each other, under any pretence of its being derived from himſelf; *Ye know*, he ſays, *that*

in its conſequences it was ſoon corrupted, and from that corruption productive of the moſt miſchievous effects. Its great author deſigned it not to be exempted from any of theſe imperfections. He revealed it only to a ſmall and obſcure corner of the world in parables and myſteries; he guarded not its original purity, which ſeems too have died with himſelf, by committing it to any written records, but left it in the hands of illiterate men, who though they were honeſt enough to die for it, were never wiſe enough perfectly to underſtand it. All policy he diſclaims in expreſs words, ſaying, *My kingdom is not of this world;* that is, I meddle not with the political affairs of mankind; I teach men to deſpiſe the world, but not to govern it. Nor did he expect any better conſequences from its progreſs than thoſe which actually followed: he was by no means ignorant of its future corruption, and that, though his primitive inſtitution breathed nothing but peace and forbearance, good-will and benevolence; yet that in mixing with the policies and intereſts of mankind, it would be

that the princes of the Gentiles exerciſe dominion over them, and they that are great exerciſe authority upon them; but it ſhall not be ſo among you, &c. Matt. xx. 25. And perhaps there is no ſtronger proof of the divine wiſdom of this great inſtructor of mankind, than the extraordinary caution with which he has paſſed over a ſubject, on which no rules could be preſcribed not inconſiſtent either with practice or with virtue: and yet a ſubject which all other legiſlators have conſidered as their moſt important object.

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productive of tyranny and oppreſſion, of martyrdoms and maſſacres, of national wars and family diſſentions. *Think not*, ſays he, *I come to ſend peace on earth, I come not to ſend peace but a ſword: for I am come to ſet a man at variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in-law.* A prophecy too fatally fulfilled!

From what inſcrutable ſource can all theſe imperfections, and all theſe conſequent evils derive their exiſtence? On what incomprehenſible plan muſt the wiſe diſpoſer of all things proceed, to ſuffer men thus to bewilder themſelves in the labyrinths of error, and from thence to plunge into the gulphs of wickedneſs and miſery, when the leaſt direction from his omnipotent hand would lead them through the flowery paths of truth to virtue and felicity? Strange! that he has not given them reaſon ſufficient to perform this important office! Stranger! that, if ever he condeſcended to aſſiſt that reaſon with his infinite wiſdom, even the religion that reſults from that ſupernatural aſſiſtance, ſhould be ſtill deficient in almoſt every one of the principal requiſites neceſſary towards accompliſhing the great and beneficent ends it was deſigned for! that it ſhould want univerſality to render it impartial, authenticity to make it demonſtrable, perſpicuity to make it intelligible, and policy to make it uſeful to mankind; that it ſhould immediately have been corrupted, and from that corruption

corruption been productive of all the misery and wickedness it seemed calculated to prevent. But on examination we shall find, that these evils, like all those of which we have before treated, owe their existence to no defect of goodness or power in God, but to the imperfection of man, and their own necessity; that is, to the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature: from whence this impracticability arises, I will endeavour to explain.

There are but two methods, that we know of, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind; that is, either by the deductions which he has impowered him to make by the force of that natural reason which he has implanted in him, or by the extraordinary interposition of divine revelation: now from the first of these little need be said to shew that nothing perfect can be expected: our reason is unstable in its foundations, and uncertain in its conclusions; our lives are extremely short, and our progress in science no less tedious, and retarded by numberless obstacles; much of our time is employed in getting ideas, and much in acquiring language to express them; few men have capacities to reason, and fewer leisure; some having sense but no learning, want materials to work with; others having learning and no sense, become more absurd by having amassed much matter to mistake about; so that to raise any tolerable system of religion

gion or morals, from human reaſon, requires the labours of many generations: from all which have already paſt how little truth can we collect? and yet, perhaps, much of that little is owing to revelation, which we are apt to think unneceſſary from the very aſſiſtance we have received from it; like the country-man who deſpiſed the ſun becauſe it ſhined in the day-time. We ſee but a very ſmall part of the great whole, and ſee that ſmall part ſo ſuperficially, that we comprehend not the eſſence of any thing; neither of body* or ſpirit, of ſpace† or time, of infinity

* Metaphyſicians divide all beings into ſpirit and matter: to ſpirit they attribute motion, activity, ſenſibility, thought, will, and reaſon, free from all ſolidity and extenſion; to matter they aſcribe ſolidity and extenſion only, void of all ſelf-motion, ſenſe, and perception; but theſe deſcriptions are quite arbitrary, founded only upon their own imaginations, and by no means conſiſtent with experience; for ſpirit ſeems to have many properties not ſo diſtinct from matter by its intimate union with it in the compoſition of all animals; and matter has certainly many qualities contradictory to this diſtinction, ſuch as coheſion, attraction, elaſticity, electricity, fermentation, heat, and vegetation, none of which can be accounted for from the mere paſſive principles of ſolidity and extenſion.

† Many philoſophers have conſidered time and ſpace as real eſſences; whereas they have certainly no more than imaginary exiſtence, derived ſolely from the imperfection of human conceptions, and human language. They are in themſelves really nothing, and the attributes we beſtow upon them are applicable with equal propriety to nothing; that is, nothing has neither beginning nor end, nor can be comprehended within any bounds. The intervening period between hiſtorical facts we diſtinguiſh by the names of days and

infinity * or eternity; we know ſcarce any thing of any thing, and leaſt of all of the nature of God or ourſelves; and therefore it is by no means ſurpriſing that all religions derived from ſuch a ſource ſhould be full of errors and abſurdities. If it be aſſerted, that God might have given to man a more comprehenſive reaſon, and a greater inſight into nature and futurity; I anſwer, he certainly might, and he might alſo have given him the ſtrength of the horſe, and the ſwiftneſs of the ſtag, as well as the underſtanding of an angel; but then he had not continued to be man; or if he had, he would have ſuffered many ſuperior evils from theſe unhappy acquiſitions.

If we conſider the other method, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind,

and years; the diſtances between places we call yards and miles; and from this manner of expreſſing ourſelves they gain the appearance of being ſomething; whereas, abſtracted from thoſe facts and places, they are really nothing: ſo that if all things were annihilated, ſpace would immediately vaniſh, and, literally ſpeaking, *Time would be no more.*

* All the ideas we have of infinity and eternity are acquired by adding, in our imagination, miles to miles, and years to years, by which means we come never the nearer to them; for no addition of parts can ever make any thing infinite or eternal; no two objects can be placed at an infinite diſtance, becauſe they would then be the two ends of infinity: an infinite number is a contradiction in terms, and therefore every thing that is infinite or eternal muſt exiſt in ſome manner which bears no manner of relation to ſpace or time, and which muſt therefore be to us totally incomprehenſible.

we ſhall find it no leſs incapable of producing a perfect one; becauſe though God is ſufficiently able to give a perfect religion, man is utterly unable to receive it. God cannot impart knowledge to creatures, of which he himſelf has made them incapable by their nature and formation; he cannot inſtruct a mole in aſtronomy, or an oyſter in muſic, becauſe he has not given them members, nor faculties neceſſary for the acquiſition of thoſe ſciences; neither is this any diminution of his omnipotence, becauſe acting in ſuch a manner would be willing contrarieties at the ſame time: it would be oppoſing his own deſigns, making creatures what they are not, and granting them powers which he thought proper to deny them; a revelation therefore from God can never be ſuch as we might expect from infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, but muſt condeſcend to the ignorance and infirmities of man. Was the wiſeſt legiſlator in the world to compoſe laws for a nurſery, they muſt be childiſh laws; ſo was God to reveal a religion to mankind, though the revealer was divine, the religion muſt be human, or it could be of no uſe to thoſe for whoſe ſake it was revealed; and therefore, like them, it muſt be liable to numberleſs imperfections, amongſt which all thoſe deficiencies before-mentioned are abſolutely unavoidable, and impoſſible to be prevented by any power whatever; theſe are the want of uni-

verſality, authenticity, perſpicuity, and policy; its certain corruption, with all that inundation of wickedneſs and miſery which muſt flow from that corruption. Great and numerous evils! from which it is not difficult to ſhew, that no revelation communicated to man can be exempted by an omnipotent revealer.

Firſt, then, it muſt want univerſality; that is, however conducive it may be to the virtue and happineſs of mankind in general, it cannot be alike communicated to all men in all ages and all nations of the world; becauſe, from the nature of things, it muſt have a beginning and a progreſſion; it muſt at firſt be revealed at ſome time and in ſome place; and whenever and wherever that is, there muſt have been times and places in which it was not revealed; and therefore it is impoſſible it can be univerſal: and this not proceeding from any impotence or partiality in the revealer, but from the modes of exiſtence of all human affairs.

It muſt likewiſe want authenticity, that is, though its divine authority may be more or leſs credible according to the circumſtances of the evidence, yet it can never be capable of a direct or demonſtrative proof; becauſe God muſt communicate this revelation to mankind either by a general or a particular inſpiration; that is, either by inſpiring all men, or by inſpiring a few to teach it to others: the firſt of theſe methods,

or

or an univerſal inſpiration, is impoſſible in nature, and abſurd even in imagination, and would be the total alteration of human nature; the other muſt be ever liable to infinite uncertainty; becauſe, though a man may poſſibly know when he himſelf is inſpired, (though that, I think, may be very well queſtioned) yet, that he ſhould ever produce indubitable credentials of divine commiſſion to others, who are uninſpired, ſeems utterly impracticable, there being no marks by which the fact can be aſcertained, nor any faculties in the human mind which are able to diſtinguiſh it: the excellence of the revelation he teaches, its beneficent ends, and the miracles he may work in its confirmation, may altogether render it more or leſs probable, but can never amount to a certain proof, becauſe we know ſo little of the ends and conſequences of things, and ſo much leſs of the nature of miracles: we underſtand indeeed nothing about them, but that we ourſelves are unable to perform them; but what beings of ſuperior orders may be able to do we cannot tell; nor yet what power, inclination, or permiſſion ſuch beings may have to deceive us. If it is impoſſible, therefore, we can be certain of the divine authority of a revelation even by a perſonal communication with its firſt author, much leſs can we be aſſured of it through the fallacious mediums of tradition or hiſtory; for whoever obſerves the propenſity men have to im-

poſe upon themſelves and others, how difficult is it to come at a true repreſentation of the commoneſt fact, even at the diſtance of a few miles, or a few years, will be eaſily convinced, that all human tradition can be nothing more than a complication of deſigned fraud and inevitable error; a glaſs which miſrepreſents all objects by magnifying or diminiſhing them, juſt as it is placed by the hand of knavery for the inſpection of folly and credulity. Hiſtory, indeed, carries with it a greater authority, but muſt ever be liable to infinite imperfections: we can never be certain that the writers of it, being men, were not impoſed upon themſelves, or did not intend to impoſe on others; and therefore its original evidence cannot be concluſive, and muſt grow daily weaker in proportion to its antiquity; it muſt neceſſarily be ſubject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and cuſtoms, ignorant tranſcribers, falſe tranſlations, interpolations, and forgeries; and as the hiſtories of religions are more connected with men's intereſts than thoſe of other occurrences, ſo they muſt be ever more ſubject to theſe frauds and impoſitions; for the ſame reaſon that a bank-note is more likely to be counterfeited than a newſpaper. It is therefore impoſſible that hiſtory can afford us any certain proof of a ſupernatural and miraculous diſpenſation, becauſe a fact, unlikely to be true, can never be demonſtrated

monſtrated by a relation not impoſſible to be falſe. If it be ſaid, that God may inſpire the writers of ſuch important records with infallibility; I anſwer, the proof that he has ſo inſpired them will be attended with no leſs difficulty, than the proof of that divine authority which is to be eſtabliſhed by it; and it muſt ever be abſurd to prove the truth of a revelation by the infallibility of its records, and the infallibility of its records from the truth of the revelation. It is plain, therefore, that, though infinite goodneſs may reveal a religion to ſo imperfect a creature as man, yet infinite power cannot, by reaſon of that imperfection, give to that revelation ſuch a degree of authenticity, that is, ſuch a demonſtrable proof of its divine authority, as ſome men unreaſonably expect, and others as ridiculouſly beſtow upon it *.

It muſt want perſpicuity; that is, it muſt be much more obſcure, both in its ſpeculative and practical doctrines, than might be expected from the interpoſition of infinite wiſdom, truth, and benevolence. In its ſpeculative doctrines, obſcurity muſt be unavoid-

* Nothing here offered is meant by any means to invalidate the authority of revelation: that of the Chriſtian is poſſeſſed of as much certainty as the nature of the fact, and the nature of its evidence will admit of. Thoſe who endeavour to beſtow more upon it, do in reality but make it leſs; and, like unſkilful architects, weaken a building already ſufficiently ſtrong, by overloading it with unneceſſary ſupporters.

able,

able, becauſe they muſt treat of ſubjects above the reach of our comprehenſions; which neither eye has ſeen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man to conceive; and therefore no power can impart to us clear and explicit ideas of ſuch things, without firſt beſtowing on us new faculties and new ſenſes; that is, without the total alteration of our natures. But what is moſt of all extraordinary is, that it muſt be likewiſe to a certain degree obſcure in its practical and moral precepts; and this from a reaſon not the leſs valid for having never before been inſiſted on; which is, from the neceſſity of moral evil; that is, ſince God, as has been ſhewn, was obliged by neceſſity to admit moral evil into the creation, he muſt probably be obliged, by the ſame neceſſity, to ſuffer it in ſome degree to continue; and therefore cannot enforce the univerſal practice of virtue by laws ſo explicit, by threats and promiſes ſo glaring, and by commands ſo inconteſtably of divine authority, as can admit of no doubt; for theſe would be ſo abſolutely irreſiſtible as at once to eradicate all human vice, which has already been proved to have been admitted only from the impoſſibility of its excluſion without the introduction of greater evils, or the loſs of ſuperior good. If omnipotence could not prevent the exiſtence of moral evil by the original formation of man, totally to extirpate it by revelation, would be to counteract

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his own wife, though incomprehenſible deſigns; and therefore a divine revelation can never be a regular body of practical inſtitutes, clear and perſpicuous, free from all doubts and altercations, enforced by perpetual miracles, by viſible and immediate rewards and puniſhments; but a ſtill voice whiſpering gentle warnings, divine admonitions, and ſupernatural truths; a light ſhining in a dark place, illuminating to a certain degree the native obſcurity of the human mind, and diſcovering by faint glimmerings the deſigns of providence, and a diſtant proſpect of a future life.

It muſt alſo want policy; that is, it can never preſcribe political rules by which mankind can be conducted in the government of nations, or their pretended rights of war and peace, becauſe all theſe affairs being incapable (as has been ſhewn) of being carried on by any other means than thoſe of violence, fraud, and corruption; a divine revelation cannot poſſibly give any directions about them; becauſe all ſuch muſt be neceſſarily inconſiſtent either with virtue or with practicability; totally to forbid theſe methods of governing mankind, who can be governed by no other, would be deſtructive of all government: to allow them, of all morality: and therefore it is neceſſary that men ſhould be left to act in theſe matters at their peril, as particular circumſtances may require, with only a general ſyſtem of religion

religion and morality for their guide. If a divine revelation can give no laws for the management of civil government, much leſs can it inſtitute any new policies peculiar to itſelf, under the names of ſpiritual or eccleſiaſtical; all which, however divine in their original, muſt neceſſarily be adminiſtered, if adminiſtered by man, by the ſame unjuſtifiable methods as others; with this additional inconvenience, that they could never be juſtly reſiſted. God cannot, therefore, I apprehend, delegate ſpiritual power to man, without patroniſing all that violence, corruption, and iniquity, which muſt reſult from it, and without which no power in the hands of men can be exerciſed over men. For the imperfection of man is incompatible with the purity of a divine government. The government of all creatures muſt correſpond with their natures; and it ſeems to me as impoſſible that ſocieties of men ſhould ſubmit under a divine government, as that wolves and tygers ſhould live together under the regulations of human policy; but moſt of all impoſſible it muſt be that a divine and human government ſhould ſubſiſt together in the ſame ſociety, for they muſt immediately claſh; and whenever that happens, the leaſt ſpark of divine authority, if really divine, muſt infallibly conſume all human power, and deſtroy all civil government whatever.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, It muſt very ſoon be corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the moſt miſchievous effects; for, as the pureſt ſtream poured into an impure veſſel, muſt partake of its impurity; ſo muſt the moſt perfect religion, that can be revealed by God to ſo imperfect a creature as man, partake of his imperfection, and produce many and great evils both natural and moral; that is, much of that miſery and wickedneſs which it was intended to prevent: this no wiſdom can obviate, no power put a ſtop to, ſo long as that imperfection remains; but it muſt conſtantly come to paſs from a train of unavoidable conſequences, which muſt invariably follow their cauſes, ſo long as human nature continues what it is.

For inſtance, when a divine revelation is firſt communicated to mankind, it muſt be received (if received at all) becauſe its precepts are approved, and its authority believed; and all thoſe nations who thus approve the one, and believe the other, muſt eſteem it both their intereſt and their duty to encourage and ſupport it. This they can effect by no other means than by granting peculiar privileges to all who profeſs it, by forming from it their national religion, and public worſhip, and by maintaining an order of men to preach that religion, and miniſter that worſhip to the people; all which amounts to a national eſtabliſhment. Now the

the moment any religion becomes national, or eſtabliſhed, its purity muſt certainly be loſt, becauſe it is then impoſſible to keep it unconnected with men's intereſts; and if connected, it muſt inevitably be perverted by them. Whenever temporal advantages are annexed to any religious profeſſion, they will be ſure to call in all thoſe who have no religion at all: knaves will embrace it for the ſake of intereſt, fools will follow them for the ſake of faſhion; and when once it is in ſuch hands, omnipotence itſelf can never preſerve its purity. That very order of men, who are maintained to ſupport its intereſts, will ſacrifice them to their own; and being in the ſole poſſeſſion of all its promiſes and all its terrors, and having the tenderneſs of childhood, the weakneſs of age, and the ignorance of the vulgar to work upon; I ſay, theſe men, veſted with all theſe powers, yet being but men, will not fail to convert all the mighty influence they muſt derive from them to the ſelfiſh ends of their own avarice and ambition, and conſequently to the total deſtruction of its original purity; from it they will lay claim to powers which it never deſigned them, and to poſſeſſions to which they have no right; to make good theſe falſe pretenſions, falſe hiſtories will be forged, and fabulous traditions invented; groundleſs terrors will be flung out to operate on ſuperſtition and timidity; creeds and articles will be contrived to confound

found all reaſon, and teſts impoſed to ſift out all who have honeſty or courage enough to reſiſt theſe unwarrantable encroachments. Devotion will be turned into farce and pageantry, to captivate men's eyes, that their pockets may with more facility be invaded: they will convert piety into ſuperſtition, zeal into rancour, and this religion, notwithſtanding all its divinity, into diabolical malevolence. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid of them; and having gained ſo conſiderable a part of the world to their intereſts, they will erect an independent dominion among themſelves dangerous to the liberties of mankind, and repreſenting all thoſe who oppoſe their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be meritorious in his ſight to perſecute them in this world, and damn them in another. Hence muſt ariſe hierarchies, inquiſitions, and popery; for popery is but the conſummation of that tyranny which every religious ſyſtem in the hands of men is in perpetual purſuit of, and whoſe principles they are all ready to adopt whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with its ſucceſs.

This tyranny cannot ſubſiſt without fierce and formidable oppoſition, from whence innumerable ſects, ſchiſms, and diſſenſions will lift up their contentious heads, each gaping for that very power which they are fighting to deſtroy, though unable either to acquire

acquire or retain it; and introductive only of their conſtant concomitants, ignorance, ſelf-conceit, ill-breeding, obſtinacy, anarchy, and confuſion. From theſe conteſts all kinds of evil muſt derive their exiſtence, blood-ſhed and deſolation, perſecutions, maſſacres and martyrdoms.

All theſe evils you ſee are but the neceſſary conſequences of the national eſtabliſhment of any religion which God can communicate to man, in whoſe hands its divinity can never long preſerve its purity, or keep it unmixed with his imperfections, his folly, and wickedneſs. Nay, ſo far is the divinity of a revelation from being able to prevent its corruption, that it will but increaſe and haſten it; for the greater ſhare of divinity it partakes, the greater excellence, the more univerſal muſt be its approbation; the more it is approved, the more it muſt be encouraged; the more it is encouraged, the ſooner it will be eſtabliſhed; and the ſooner it is eſtabliſhed, the ſooner it muſt be corrupted and made ſubſervient to the worſt purpoſes of the worſt men; yet it is plain this eſtabliſhment is no more than the conſequence of its excellence, and men's approbation; no more than the alternative of its total extinction, and without which it cannot be preſerved at all; and therefore the corruption of every divine revelation communicated to man, is, by the nature of man, clearly unavoidable.

From

From what has been here ſaid it appears plainly that all the numerous evils which adhere to, and all the miſchievous effects which follow all human religions, whether natural or revealed, by no means owe their exiſtence to any want of power, wiſdom, or goodneſs in God, but, like all others, to the imperfection of man; that is, to his folly and wickedneſs, which muſt inevitably corrupt them. It is alſo, I think, no leſs evident that all arguments levelled againſt the divine original of Chriſtianity, founded on its imperfections and pernicious conſequences, (which are all, I think, that have any weight) may be proved to be vain and inconcluſive; and this not by concealing or denying thoſe imperfections and pernicious conſequences, as many have abſurdly attempted, but by fairly ſhewing, that they all proceed from the imperfections of thoſe creatures to whom it is revealed; and that, ſo long as thoſe continue, theſe cannot be prevented by any wiſdom, goodneſs, or power whatever *.

Thus, Sir, if I miſtake not, I have ſufficiently, though conciſely, anſwered that moſt abſtruſe and important queſtion, *Whence came evil?* and proved, that all the evils we feel, and

* If we look into the deiſtical writings of all times, we ſhall find, that they have always attacked the Chriſtian religion moſt ſucceſsfully from this ground; they have ſhewed the many imperfections that adhere to it, and then concluded, that nothing imperfect could derive its original from

and all which we ſee around us, derogate not in the leaſt from the wiſdom, power, or goodneſs of our Creator; but proceed entirely from that ſubordination which is ſo neceſſary to the happineſs, and even to the exiſtence of the great and incomprehenſible whole. I have ſhewn that all ſubordination muſt imply imperfection in ſome beings or other; and that all imperfection muſt conſiſt in the abſence of comparative good, or the admiſſion of poſitive evil. I have ſhewn that moſt of the evils we uſually complain of are of the firſt kind; the want only of thoſe perfections we ſee others enjoy, or imagine infinite power might have beſtowed upon ourſelves; which are therefore in fact no evils at all: that thoſe of the latter ſort, or poſitive evils, are ſuch as from the nature of things muſt intrude themſelves into all creation, and therefore that omnipotence can do no more than make choice of that ſyſtem which admits the feweſt; being obliged by the imperfection of all created beings, the untractableneſs of matter, and ſome incomprehenſible connection between good and evil, happineſs and miſery, to admit both, or to give exiſtence to neither. I have likewiſe ſhewn that moral evil may have its neceſſity and utility as well as natural; at leaſt,

from God; their adverſaries have injudiciouſly denied thoſe imperfections, which for the moſt part are true, and agreed to their concluſion, which is indiſputably falſe; for every thing we poſſeſs is derived from God, and yet we poſſeſs nothing endued with abſolute perfection.

that

that if natural evils are neceſſary, moral ones are expedient, to prevent that neceſſary miſery from falling to the ſhare of perfect innocence, and to convert unavoidable ſufferings into juſt puniſhments; that though the eſſence of all moral evil conſiſts in the production of natural, yet it may have ſome collateral tendency to good; and that the wicked, whilſt they are juſtly puniſhed for the miſeries which they occaſion, may probably, by that very guilt and puniſhment, ſome way remotely contribute to univerſal happineſs. I have ſhewn that if natural and moral evils could not be prevented, the exiſtence of political and religious evils muſt of courſe be unavoidable, they being but the certain conſequences of the other: that all human government muſt be in the higheſt degree imperfect, and big with all manner of evils, being the dominion of ignorant and wicked creatures over each other; that, as ſuch creatures can be governed only by fear of puniſhment or hopes of reward, all government amongſt them muſt be founded on violence or corruption, and ever ſupported and adminiſtered by the ſame vicious and unjuſtifiable methods: that no power whatever can give a perfect religion to ſo imperfect a creature as man, either by nature or revelation; not by nature, becauſe, whilſt that is human nature, he can never diſcover by reaſon the truths on which a perfect ſyſtem of theology or ethics can be erected; not by revelation, becauſe he wants

faculties

faculties to comprehend ſuch ſupernatural diſcoveries, although they ſhould be imparted to him; that, was he capable of once receiving a perfect religion, it is not poſſible he could retain it; becauſe if it could be kept entirely ſeparate from his worldly intereſts, it would ſoon be neglected and periſh in oblivion; and, if it was not, ſuch a connection would quickly corrupt its purity, and deſtroy its eſſence, ſo that national eſtabliſhments would be neceſſary for its ſupport, and yet infallibly productive of its deſtruction. That all theſe evils proceed not from wrong diſpoſitions or accidental cauſes, but ſingly and ſolely from the imperfection of man; and yet that in gradation from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing, there muſt be one rank occupied by ſuch a creature as man with all his imperfections about him; that theſe imperfections muſt be annexed to his ſituation, and adhere to every thing that relates to him, to his happineſs, to his morals, to his government, and to his religion: that, in like manner, all other created beings muſt have evils and imperfections peculiar to their ſtations, and proportioned to their inferiority; notwithſtanding all which, there is as much good and as little evil in the univerſal ſyſtem, as the nature of creation will admit of; and that therefore it is a work equal to what we might expect from the operations of infinite benevolence joined with infinite power.

DIS-

DISQUISITIONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

DISQUISITION I.

ON THE CHAIN OF UNIVERSAL BEING.

THE farther we inquire into the works of our great Creator, the more evident marks we ſhall diſcover of his infinite wiſdom and power, and perhaps none more remarkable, than in that wonderful chain of beings, with which this terreſtrial globe is furniſhed; riſing above each other, from the ſenſeleſs clod, to the brighteſt genius of human kind, in which, though the chain itſelf is ſufficiently viſible, the links, which compoſe it, are ſo minute, and ſo finely wrought, that they are quite imperceptible to our eyes. The various qualities, with which theſe various beings are endued, we perceive without difficulty, but the boundaries of thoſe

qualities, which form this chain of ſubordination are ſo mixed, that where one ends, and the next begins, we are unable to diſcover. The manner by which this is performed, is a ſubject well worthy of our conſideration, though I do not remember to have ſeen it much conſidered; but on an accurate examination appears to be this.

In order to diffuſe all poſſible happineſs, God has been pleaſed to fill this earth with innumerable orders of beings, ſuperior to each other in proportion to the qualities and faculties which he has thought proper to beſtow upon them; to mere matter he has given extenſion, ſolidity, and gravity; to plants, vegetation; to animals, life and inſtinct; and to man, reaſon; each of which ſuperior qualities augments the excellence and dignity of the poſſeſſor, and places him higher in the ſcale of univerſal exiſtence. In all theſe, it is remarkable, that he has not formed this neceſſary and beautiful ſubordination, by placing beings of quite different natures above each other, but by granting ſome additional quality to each ſuperior order, in conjunction with all thoſe poſſeſſed by their inferiors; ſo that, though they riſe above each other in excellence, by means of theſe additional qualities, one mode of exiſtence is common to them all, without which they never could have coaleſced in one uniform and regular ſyſtem.

Thus,

Thus, for inſtance, in plants we find all the qualities of mere matter, the only order below them, ſolidity, extenſion, and gravity, with the addition of vegetation; in animals, all the properties of matter, together with the vegetation of plants, to which is added, life and inſtinct; and in man we find all the properties of matter, the vegetation of plants, the life and inſtinct of animals, to all which is ſuperadded reaſon.

That man is endued with theſe properties of all inferior orders, will plainly appear by a ſlight examination of his compoſition; his body is material, and has all the properties of mere matter, ſolidity, extenſion, and gravity; it is alſo veſted with the quality of plants, that is, a power of vegetation, which it inceſſantly exerciſes without any knowledge or conſent of his; it is ſown, grows up, expands, comes to maturity, withers, and dies, like all other vegetables: he poſſeſſes likewiſe the qualities of lower animals, and ſhares their fate; like them, he is called into life without his knowledge or conſent; like them, he is compelled by irreſiſtible inſtincts, to anſwer the purpoſes for which he was deſigned; like them, he performs his deſtined courſe, partakes of its bleſſings, and endures its ſufferings for a ſhort time, then dies, and is ſeen no more: in him inſtinct is not leſs powerful than in them, though leſs viſible, by being confounded with reaſon, which it ſometimes

concurs with, and ſometimes counteracts; by this, with the concurrence of reaſon, he is taught the belief of a God, of a future ſtate, and the difference between moral good and evil; to purſue happineſs, to avoid danger, and to take care of himſelf and his offspring; by this too he is frequently impelled, in contradiction to reaſon, to relinquiſh eaſe and ſafety, to traverſe inhoſpitable deſerts and tempeſtuous ſeas, to inflict and ſuffer all the miſeries of war, and, like the herring and the mackarel, to haſten to his own deſtruction, for the public benefit, which he neither underſtands or cares for. Thus is this wonderful chain extended from the loweſt to the higheſt order of terreſtrial beings, by links ſo nicely fitted, that the beginning and end of each is inviſible to the moſt inquiſitive eye, and yet they altogether compoſe one vaſt and beautiful ſyſtem of ſubordination.

The manner by which the conſummate wiſdom of the divine artificer has formed this gradation, ſo extenſive in the whole, and ſo imperceptible in the parts, is this:—He conſtantly unites the higheſt degree of the qualities of each inferior order to the loweſt degree of the ſame qualities, belonging to the order next above it; by which means, like the colours of a ſkilful painter, they are ſo blended together, and ſhaded off into each other, that no line of diſtinction is any where to be ſeen. Thus, for inſtance, ſolidity

dity, extenſion, and gravity, the qualities of mere matter, being united with the loweſt degree of vegetation, compoſe a ſtone; from whence this vegetative power aſcending through an infinite variety of herbs, flowers, plants and trees to its greateſt perfection in the ſenſitive plant, joins there the loweſt degree of animal life in the ſhell-fiſh which adheres to the rock; and it is difficult to diſtinguiſh which poſſeſſes the greateſt ſhare, as the one ſhews it only by ſhrinking from the finger, and the other by opening to receive the water which ſurrounds it. In the ſame manner this animal life riſes from this low beginning in the ſhell-fiſh, through innumerable ſpecies of inſects, fiſhes, birds, and beaſts to the confines of reaſon, where, in the dog, the monkey, and chimpanzè it unites ſo cloſely with the loweſt degree of that quality in man, that they cannot eaſily be diſtinguiſhed from each other. From this loweſt degree in the brutal Hottentot, reaſon, with the aſſiſtance of learning and ſcience, advances, through the various ſtages of human underſtanding, which riſe above each other, till in a Bacon or a Newton it attains the ſummit.

Here we muſt ſtop, being unable to purſue the progreſs of this aſtoniſhing chain beyond the limits of this terreſtrial globe with the naked eye; but through the perſpective of analogy and conjecture, we may perceive that it aſcends a great deal higher, to the inha-

inhabitants of other planets, to angels, and archangels, the loweſt orders of whom may be united by a like eaſy tranſition with the higheſt of our own, in whom to reaſon may be added intuitive knowledge, inſight into futurity, with innumerable other faculties, of which we are unable to form the leaſt idea; through whom it may aſcend, by gradations almoſt infinite, to thoſe moſt exalted of created beings, who are ſeated on the foot-ſtool of the celeſtial throne.

DISQUISITION II.

ON CRUELTY TO INFERIOR ANIMALS.

MAN is that link of the chain of univerſal exiſtence, by which ſpiritual and corporeal beings are united: as the numbers and variety of the latter his inferiors are almoſt infinite, ſo probably are thoſe of the former his ſuperiors; and as we ſee that the lives and happineſs of thoſe below us are dependant on our wills, we may reaſonably conclude, that our lives and happineſs are equally dependant on the wills of thoſe above us; accountable, like ourſelves, for the uſe of this power, to the Supreme Creator and Governor of all things. Should this analogy be well founded, how criminal will our

our account appear, when laid before that juſt and impartial judge! How will man, that ſanguinary tyrant, be able to excuſe himſelf from the charge of thoſe innumerable cruelties inflicted on his unoffending ſubjects committed to his care, formed for his benefit, and placed under his authority by their common father? whoſe mercy is over all his works, and who expects that this authority ſhould be exerciſed not only with tenderneſs and mercy, but in conformity to the laws of juſtice and gratitude.

But to what horrid deviations from theſe benevolent intentions are we daily witneſſes! No ſmall part of mankind derive their chief amuſements from the deaths and ſufferings of inferior animals; a much greater, conſider them only as engines of wood or iron, uſeful in their ſeveral occupations. The carman drives his horſe, and the carpenter his nail, by repeated blows; and ſo long as theſe produce the deſired effect, and they both go, they neither reflect or care whether either of them have any ſenſe of feeling. The butcher knocks down the ſtately ox with no more compaſſion than the black-ſmith hammers a horſe-ſhoe, and plunges his knife into the throat of the innocent lamb, with as little reluctance as the taylor ſticks his needle into the collar of a coat.

If there are ſome few, who, formed in a ſofter mould, view with pity the ſufferings of theſe defenceleſs creatures, there is ſcarce

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one who entertains the leaſt idea, that juſtice or gratitude can be due to their merits or their ſervices. The ſocial and friendly dog is hanged without remorſe, if, by barking in defence of his maſter's perſon and property, he happens unknowingly to diſturb his reſt; the generous horſe, who has carried his ungrateful maſter for many years with eaſe and ſafety, worn out with age and infirmities contracted in his ſervice, is by him condemned to end his miſerable days in a duſt-cart, where the more he exerts his little remains of ſpirit, the more he is whipped, to ſave his ſtupid driver the trouble of whipping ſome other, leſs obedient to the laſh. Sometimes, having been taught the practice of many unnatural and uſeleſs feats in a riding-houſe, he is at laſt turned out and conſigned to the dominion of a hackney-coachman, by whom he is every day corrected for performing thoſe tricks, which he has learned under ſo long and ſevere a diſcipline. The ſluggiſh bear, in contradiction to his nature, is taught to dance, for the diverſion of a malignant mob, by placing red-hot irons under his feet; and the majeſtic bull is tortured by every mode which malice can invent, for no offence but that he is gentle, and unwilling to aſſail his diabolical tormentors. Theſe, with innumerable other acts of cruelty, injuſtice, and ingratitude, are every day committed, not only with impunity, but without cenſure, and even without

out obſervation; but we may be aſſured, that they cannot finally paſs away unnoticed and unretaliated.

The laws of ſelf-defence undoubtedly juſtify us in deſtroying thoſe animals who would deſtroy us, who injure our properties, or annoy our perſons; but not even theſe, whenever their ſituation incapacitates them from hurting us. I know of no right which we have to ſhoot a bear on an inacceſſible iſland of ice, or an eagle on the mountain's top, whoſe lives cannot injure us, nor deaths procure us any benefit. We are unable to give life, and therefore ought not wantonly to take it away from the meaneſt inſect, without ſufficient reaſon; they all receive it from the ſame benevolent hand as ourſelves, and have therefore an equal right to enjoy it.

God has been pleaſed to create numberleſs animals intended for our ſuſtenance; and that they are ſo intended, the agreeable flavour of their fleſh to our palates, and the wholeſome nutriment which it adminiſters to our ſtomachs, are ſufficient proofs: theſe, as they are formed for our uſe, propagated by our culture, and fed by our care, we have certainly a right to deprive of life, becauſe it is given and preſerved to them on that condition; but this ſhould always be performed with all the tenderneſs and compaſſion which ſo diſagreeable an office will permit; and no circumſtances ought to be omitted,

omitted, which can render their executions as quick and eaſy as poſſible. For this, providence has wiſely and benevolently provided, by forming them in ſuch a manner, that their fleſh becomes rancid and unpalatable by a painful and lingering death; and has thus compelled us to be merciful without compaſſion, and cautious of their ſuffering for the ſake of ourſelves; but, if there are any whoſe taſtes are ſo vitiated, and whoſe hearts are ſo hardened, as to delight in ſuch inhuman ſacrifices, and to partake of them without remorſe, they ſhould be looked upon as dæmons in human ſhapes, and expect a retaliation of thoſe tortures which they have inflicted on the innocent, for the gratification of their own depraved and unnatural appetites.

So violent are the paſſions of anger and revenge in the human breaſt, that it is not wonderful that men ſhould perſecute their real or imaginary enemies with cruelty and malevolence; but that there ſhould exiſt in nature a being who can receive pleaſure from giving pain, would be totally incredible, if we were not convinced, by melancholy experience, that there are not only many, but that this unaccountable diſpoſition is in ſome manner inherent in the nature of man; for as he cannot be taught by example, nor led to it by temptation, or prompted to it by intereſt, it muſt be derived from his native conſtitution; and is a remarkable

remarkable confirmation of what revelation ſo frequently inculcates—that he brings into the world with him an original depravity, the effects of a fallen and degenerate ſtate; in proof of which we need only obſerve, that the nearer he approaches to a ſtate of nature, the more predominant this diſpoſition appears, and the more violently it operates. We ſee children laughing at the miſeries which they inflict on every unfortunate animal which comes within their power: all ſavages are ingenious in contriving, and happy in executing the moſt exquiſite tortures; and the common people of all countries are delighted with nothing ſo much as bull-baitings, prize-fightings, executions, and all ſpectacles of cruelty and horror. Though civilization may in ſome degree abate this native ferocity, it can never quite extirpate it; the moſt poliſhed are not aſhamed to be pleaſed with ſcenes of little leſs barbarity, and, to the diſgrace of human nature, to dignify them with the name of ſports. They arm cocks with artificial weapons, which nature had kindly denied to their malevolence, and with ſhouts of applauſe and triumph ſee them plunge them into each other's hearts: they view with delight the trembling deer and defenceleſs hare, flying for hours in the utmoſt agonies of terror and deſpair, and at laſt, ſinking under fatigue, devoured by their mercileſs purſuers; they ſee with joy the beautiful pheaſant and harmleſs partridge drop

drop from their flight, weltering in their blood, or perhaps periſhing with wounds and hunger, under the cover of ſome friendly thicket to which they have in vain retreated for ſafety; they triumph over the unſuſpecting fiſh, whom they have decoyed by an inſidious pretence of feeding, and drag him from his native element by a hook fixed to and tearing out his entrails; and to add to all this, they ſpare neither labour nor expence to preſerve and propagate theſe innocent animals, for no other end but to multiply the objects of their perſecution.

What name ſhould we beſtow on a ſuperior being, whoſe whole endeavours were employed, and whoſe whole pleaſure conſiſted in terrifying, enſnaring, tormenting, and deſtroying mankind? whoſe ſuperior faculties were exerted in fomenting animoſities amongſt them, in contriving engines of deſtruction, and inciting them to uſe them in maiming and murdering each other? whoſe power over them was employed in aſſiſting the rapacious, deceiving the ſimple, and oppreſſing the innocent? who, without provocation or advantage, ſhould continue from day to day, void of all pity and remorſe, thus to torment mankind for diverſion, and at the ſame time endeavour with the utmoſt care to preſerve their lives, and to propagate their ſpecies, in order to increaſe the number of victims devoted to his malevolence, and be delighted

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in proportion to the miſeries which he occaſioned? I ſay, what name deteſtable enough could we find for ſuch a being? Yet, if we impartially conſider the caſe, and our intermediate ſituation, we muſt acknowledge that, with regard to inferior animals, juſt ſuch a being is a ſportſman.

DISQUISITION III.

ON A PRÆ-EXISTENT STATE.

THAT mankind had exiſted in ſome ſtate previous to the preſent, was the opinion of the wiſeſt ſages of the moſt remote antiquity. It was held by the Gymnoſophiſts of Egypt, the Brachmans of India, the Magi of Perſia, and the greateſt philoſophers of Greece and Rome; it was likewiſe adopted by the fathers of the Chriſtian church, and frequently enforced by her primitive writers; why it has been ſo little noticed, ſo much overlooked, rather than rejected, by the divines and metaphyſicians of later ages, I am at a loſs to account for, as it is undoubtedly confirmed by reaſon, by all the appearances of nature, and the doctrines of revelation.

In the firſt place then it is confirmed by reaſon, which teaches us that it is impoſſible that

that the conjunction of a male and female can create, or bring into being an immortal ſoul; they may prepare a material habitation for it; but there muſt be an immaterial præ-exiſtent inhabitant ready to take poſſeſſion. Reaſon aſſures us, that an immortal ſoul, which will exiſt eternally after the diſſolution of the body, muſt have eternally exiſted before the formation of it; for whatever has no end, can never have had any beginning, but exiſt in ſome manner which bears no relation to time, to us totally incomprehenſible; if therefore the ſoul will continue to exiſt in a future life, it muſt have exiſted in a former. Reaſon likewiſe tells us, that an omnipotent and benevolent Creator would never have formed ſuch a world as this, and filled it with ſuch inhabitants, if the preſent was the only, or even the firſt ſtate of their exiſtence, a ſtate which, if unconnected with the paſt and the future, ſeems calculated for no one purpoſe intelligible to our underſtandings; neither of good or evil, of happineſs or miſery, of virtue or vice, of reward or puniſhment, but a confuſed jumble of them altogether, proceeding from no viſible cauſe, and tending to no end. But, as we are certain that infinite power cannot be employed without effect, nor infinite wiſdom without deſign, we may rationally conclude, that this world could be deſigned for nothing more than a priſon, in which we are awhile confined to receive puniſhment for the

the offences committed in a former, and an opportunity of preparing ourſelves for the enjoyment of happineſs in a future life.

Secondly, Theſe concluſions of reaſon are ſufficiently confirmed by the face of nature and the appearances of things; this world is evidently formed for a place of puniſhment as well as probation; a priſon, or houſe of correction, to which we are committed, ſome for a longer, and ſome for a ſhorter period; ſome to the ſevereſt labour, others to more indulgent taſks; and if we conſider it under this character, we ſhall perceive it admirably fitted for the end for which it was intended. It is a ſpacious, beautiful, and durable ſtructure; it contains many various apartments, a few very comfortable, many tolerable, and ſome extremely wretched; it is encloſed with a fence ſo impaſſable, that none can ſurmount it but with the loſs of life. Its inhabitants likewiſe exactly reſemble thoſe of other priſons: they come in with malignant diſpoſitions, and unruly paſſions, from whence, like other confined criminals, they receive great part of their puniſhment by abuſing and injuring each other. As we may ſuppoſe, that they have not all been equally guilty, ſo they are not all equally miſerable; the majority are permitted to procure a tolerable ſubſiſtence by their labour, and paſs through their confinement without any extraordinary penalties, except from paying their fees, at their diſcharge by death.

death. Others, who perhaps ſtand in need of more ſevere chaſtiſement, receive it by a variety of methods; ſome by the moſt acute, and ſome by the moſt tedious pains and diſeaſes; ſome by diſappointments, and many by ſucceſs, in their favourite purſuits; ſome by being condemned to ſituations peculiarly unfortunate, as to thoſe of extreme poverty, or ſuperabundant riches, of deſpicable meanneſs, or painful pre-eminence, of galley-ſlaves in a deſpotic, or miniſters in a free country. If we ſurvey the various regions of the globe, what dreadful ſcenes of wretchedneſs every where preſent themſelves to our eyes! in ſome, we ſee thouſands chained to the oar, and perpetually ſuffering from the inclemency of all weathers, and their more inclement maſters; in ſome, not fewer condemned to wear out their miſerable lives in dreary mines, deprived of air and daylight; and in others, much greater numbers torn from their native country, their families, and friends, and ſold to the moſt inhuman of all tyrants, under whoſe laſh they are worn out with fatigue, or expire in torments. The hiſtory of mankind is indeed little more than a detail of their miſeries, ſome inflicted by the hand of providence, and many more by their own wickedneſs, and mutual ill-uſage. As nations, we ſee them ſometimes chaſtiſed by plagues, famines, inundations, and earthquakes; and continually deſtroying each other with fire and

and ſword; we ſee fleets and armies combating with ſavage fury, and employing againſt each other every inſtrument of torture and death, which malevolence can invent, or ferocity make uſe of; we ſee the dying and the dead huddled together in heaps, and weltering in each other's blood; and can we be ſpectators of this horrid tragedy, without conſidering the performers as condemned criminals, compelled, like the gladiators of the ancients, to receive their puniſhment from each other's hands? The orator, the poet, and the hiſtorian may celebrate them as heroes fighting for the rights and liberties of their reſpective countries; but the Chriſtian philoſopher can look upon them in no other light than as condemned ſpirits exiled into human fleſh, and ſent into this world to chaſtiſe each other for paſt offences. As individuals, we ſee men afflicted with innumerable diſeaſes, which proceed not from accident, but are congenial with their original formations, and evidently the diſpoſitions of providence, deſigned for the moſt important ends; the ſtone grows in the human bladder, under the ſame direction as in the quarry, and the ſeeds of ſcurvy, rheumatiſm, and gout are ſown in the blood by the ſame omnipotent hand, which has ſcattered thoſe of vegetables over the face of the earth. From theſe various inſtruments of torture, numberleſs are the miſeries which mankind endure; nor are

thoſe perhaps leſs numerous, though leſs viſible, which they ſuffer from that treachery, injuſtice, ingratitude, ill-humour, and perverſeneſs, with which they every hour torment one another, interrupt the peace of ſociety, and imbitter the comforts of domeſtic life; to all which we may add that wonderful ingenuity which they poſſeſs, of creating imaginary, in the abſence of real misfortunes, and that corroſive quality in the human mind, which, for want of the proper food of buſineſs or contemplation, preys upon itſelf, and makes ſolitude intolerable, and thinking a moſt painful taſk. Who, that ſurveys this melancholy picture of the preſent life, can entertain a doubt, but that it is intended for a ſtate of puniſhment, and therefore muſt be ſubſequent to ſome former, in which this puniſhment was deſerved.

Laſtly, The opinion of præ-exiſtence is no leſs confirmed by revelation than by reaſon, and the appearances of things: for, although perhaps it is no where in the New Teſtament explicitly enforced, yet throughout the whole tenour of thoſe writings it is every where implied: in them mankind are conſtantly repreſented as coming into the world under a load of guilt; as condemned criminals, the children of wrath, and objects of divine indignation; placed in it for a time by the mercies of God, to give them an opportunity of expiating this guilt by ſufferings, and regaining, by a pious and virtuous

tuous conduct, their loſt ſtate of happineſs and innocence: this is ſtiled working out their ſalvation, not preventing their condemnation, for that is already paſt, and their only hope now is redemption, that is, being reſcued from a ſtate of captivity and ſin, in which they are univerſally involved. This is the very eſſence of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, and the grand principle in which it differs from the religion of nature; in every other reſpect they are nearly ſimilar; they both enjoin the ſame moral duties, and prohibit the ſame vices; both inculcate the belief of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; but here they eſſentially diſagree; natural religion informs us, that a juſt and benevolent Creator could have no other deſign in placing us in this world, but to make us happy, and that, if we commit no extraordinary crimes, we may hope to be ſo in another; but Chriſtianity teaches a ſeverer and more alarming leſſon, and acquaints us, that we are admitted into this life oppreſſed with guilt and depravity, which we muſt atone for by ſuffering its uſual calamities, and work off by acts of poſitive virtue, before we can hope for happineſs in another. Now, if by all this a præ-exiſtent ſtate is not conſtantly ſuppoſed, that is, that mankind have exiſted in ſome ſtate previous to the preſent, in which this guilt was incurred, and this depravity contracted, there can be no meaning at all, or ſuch a meaning as contradicts every principle of common ſenſe

—that guilt can be contracted without acting, or that we can act without exiſting: ſo undeniable is this inference, that it renders any poſitive aſſertion of a præ-exiſtent ſtate totally uſeleſs; as, if a man at the moment of his entrance into a new country was declared a criminal, it would ſurely be unneceſſary to aſſert, that he had lived in ſome other before he came there.

In all our reſearches into abſtruſe ſubjects, there is a certain clue, without which, the further we proceed the more we are bewildered, but which being fortunately diſcovered, leads us at once through the whole labyrinth, puts an end to our difficulties, and opens a ſyſtem perfectly clear, conſiſtent, and intelligible. The doctrine of præ-exiſtence, or the acknowledgment of ſome paſt ſtate of guilt and diſobedience, I take to be this very clue; which, if we conſtantly carry along with us, we ſhall proceed unembarraſſed through all the intricate myſteries both of nature and revelation, and at laſt arrive at ſo clear a proſpect of the wiſe and juſt diſpenſations of our Creator, as cannot fail to afford compleat ſatisfaction to the moſt inquiſitive ſceptic.

For inſtance; Are we unable to anſwer that important queſtion, Whence came evil? that is, why a Creator of infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, ſhould have formed a world replete with ſo many imperfections, and thoſe ſo productive of calamities to its inhabitants?

inhabitants? this clue will direct us to this satisfactory reply, as far as the question relates to the evils of the present life—because he designed it for a place of punishment and probation, for which it is perfectly adapted; and we can be no more surprised to see such a world as this make a part of the universal system, than to see a magnificent prison, with all its appendages of punishment, whips, pillories, and gibbets, make a part of a large, populous, and well-governed city. Are we under difficulties to comprehend why the same omnipotent and benevolent Creator should fill this world with inhabitants so wicked, and so miserable? this clue will immediately lead us to a solution of them, and point out the true reason—because they are sent hither to be punished and reformed. Do we reject all those passages in the New Testament as derogatory to the divine wisdom and goodness, which declare, that mankind come into this world under a load of guilt and depravity, and under the displeasure of their Creator?—no sooner are we brought by this clue within sight of a præexistent state, in which this guilt and depravity may have been contracted, but our incredulity vanishes, and we perceive plainly, that their admission into this world, under those circumstances, is not only consistent with the justice of God, but the strongest instance of his mercy and benevolence; as by it they are enabled to purge off this depravity

ty, to expiate their offences, and to reinſtate themſelves in his favour.

Thus is a præ-exiſtent ſtate, I think, clearly demonſtrated, by the principles of reaſon, the appearances of things, and the ſenſe of revelation; all which agree, that this world is intended for a place of puniſhment, as well as probation, and muſt therefore refer to ſome former period; for, as probation implies a future life, for which it is preparatory, ſo puniſhment muſt imply a former ſtate, in which offences were committed, for which it is due; and indeed there is not a ſingle argument drawn from the juſtice of God, and the ſeemingly undeſerved ſufferings of many in the preſent ſtate, which can be urged in proof of a future life, which proves not with ſuperior force the exiſtence of another, which is already paſt.

DISQUISITION IV.

ON THE NATURE OF TIME.

WE are ſo accuſtomed to connect our ideas of time with the hiſtory of what paſſes in it, that is, to miſtake a ſucceſſion of thoughts and actions for time, that we find it extremely difficult, perhaps impoſſible, totally

totally to ſeparate or diſtinguiſh them from each other: and indeed, had we power to effect this in our minds, all human language is ſo formed, that it would fail us in our expreſſion: yet certain it is, that time, abſtracted from the thoughts, actions, and motions which paſs in it, is actually nothing: it is only the mode in which ſome created beings are ordained to exiſt, but in itſelf has really no exiſtence at all.

Though this opinion may ſeem chimerical to many, who have not much conſidered the ſubject, yet it is by no means new, for it was long ſince adopted by ſome of the moſt celebrated philoſophers of antiquity, particularly by the Epicureans; and is thus well expreſſed by Lucretius:

Tempus item per ſe non eſt; ſed rebus ab ipſis
Conſequitur ſenſus, tranſactum quod ſit in ævo,
Tum quæ res inſtat, quid porro deinde ſequatur;
Nec per ſe, quemquam tempus ſentire, fatendum eſt,
Semotum ab uſu, motu, plâcidaque quiete.

Time of itſelf is nothing; but from thought
Receives its riſe, by lab'ring fancy wrought,
From things conſidered: while we think on ſome
As preſent, ſome as paſt, and ſome to come:
No thought can think on Time, that's ſtill confeſs'd,
But thinks on things in motion, or at reſt.

CREECH.

From obſerving the diurnal revolutions of the ſun, and the various tranſactions which paſs during thoſe revolutions, we acquire conceptions of days; by dividing theſe days we

we form hours, minutes, and ſeconds; and by multiplying them, months, years, and ages; then by meaſuring theſe imaginary periods againſt each other, and beſtowing on each diſtinct denominations, we give them the appearance of ſomething real: yeſterday, which is paſt, and to-morrow, which is not yet come, aſſume the ſame reality as the preſent day; and thus we imagine time to reſemble a great book, one of whoſe pages is every day wrote on, and the reſt remain blank, to be filled up in their turns with the events of futurity; whilſt in fact this is all but the deluſion of our own imaginations, and time is nothing more than the manner in which paſt, preſent, and future events ſucceed each other: yet is this deluſion ſo correſpondent with our preſent ſtate, and ſo woven up with all human language, that without much reflection it cannot be perceived, nor when perceived can it be remedied; nor can I, while endeavouring to prove time to be nothing, avoid treating it as ſomething in almoſt every line.

There ſeems to be in the nature of things two modes of exiſtence; one, in which all events, paſt, preſent, and to come, appear in one view; which, if the expreſſion may be allowed, I ſhall call perpetually inſtantaneous; and which, as I apprehend, conſtitutes Eternity: the other, in which all things are preſented ſeparately and ſucceſſively, which produces what we call Time.

Of

Of the firſt of theſe human reaſon can afford us no manner of conception; yet it aſſures us, on the ſtrongeſt evidence, that ſuch muſt be the exiſtence of the Supreme Creator of all things, that ſuch probably may be the exiſtence of many ſuperior orders of created beings, and that ſuch poſſibly may be our own in another ſtate: to beings ſo conſtituted, all events paſt, preſent, and future, are preſented in one congregated maſs, which to us are ſpread out in ſucceſſion to adapt them to our temporary mode of perception: in theſe ideas have no ſucceſſion, and therefore to their thoughts, actions, or exiſtence, time, which is ſucceſſion only, can bear not the leaſt relation whatſoever. To exiſtence of this kind alone can eternity belong; for eternity can never be compoſed of finite parts, which, however multiplied, can never become infinite; but muſt be ſome thing ſimple, uniform, invariable, and indiviſible; permanent, though inſtantaneous, and endleſs without progreſſion. There are ſome remarkable expreſſions both in the Old and New Teſtament, alluding to this mode of exiſtence; in the former, God is denominated *I am* *; and in the latter, Chriſt ſays, *Before Abraham was, I am* †: both evidently implying duration without ſucceſſion: from whence the ſchoolmen probably derive their obſcure notions of ſuch a kind of dura-

* Exod. iv. 14. † John viii. 58.

tion,

tion, which they explain by the more obſcure term of *punctum ſtans.*

With the other mode of exiſtence we are ſufficiently acquainted, being that in which Providence has placed us, and all things around us, during our reſidence on this terreſtrial globe; in which all ideas follow each other in our minds in a regular and uniform ſucceſſion, not unlike the tickings of a clock; and by that means all objects are preſented to our imaginations in the ſame progreſſive manner: and if any vary much from that deſtined pace, by too rapid or too ſlow a motion, they immediately become to us totally imperceptible. We now perceive every one, as it paſſes, through a ſmall aperture ſeparately, as in the camera obſcura, and this we call time; but at the concluſion of this ſtate we may probably exiſt in a manner quite different; the window may be thrown open, the whole proſpect appear at one view, and all this apparatus, which we call time, be totally done away: for time is certainly nothing more than the ſhifting of ſcenes neceſſary for the performance of this tragi-comical farce, which we are here exhibiting, and muſt undoubtedly end with the concluſion of the drama. It has no more a real eſſence, independent of thought and action, than ſight, hearing, and ſmell have, independent of their proper organs, and the animals to whom they belong; and when they ceaſe to exiſt, time can

can be no more. There are alſo ſeveral paſſages in the ſcriptures, declaring this annihilation of time, at the conſummation of all things: *And the Angel, which I ſaw ſtand upon the ſea and the earth, lifted up his hand towards heaven, and ſwore by him that liveth for ever and ever*, &c. *that there ſhould be time no longer* *.

To this opinion of the non-entity of time it has by ſome been objected, that time has many attributes and powers inherent in its nature; and that whatever has attributes and powers, muſt itſelf exiſt: it is infinite, ſay they, and eternal; it contains all things and forces itſelf on our imaginations in the abſence of all other exiſtence. But to this it may be anſwered, that the human mind is able in the very ſame manner to realize nothing; and then all the ſame attributes and powers are applicable with equal propriety to that nothing, thus ſuppoſed to be ſomething:

† Nothing, thou elder brother ev'n to ſhade!
Thou had'ſt a being, ere the world was made,
And well fix'd are alone of ending not afraid.

Nothing is infinite, and eternal; that is, hath neither beginning nor end: it contains all things; that is, it begins where all exiſtence ends, and therefore ſurrounds and contains all things: it forces itſelf on the mind, in the abſence of all exiſtence; that is, where

* Rev. x. 5. † Lord Rocheſter.

we

we ſuppoſe there is no exiſtence, we muſt ſuppoſe there is nothing: this exact reſemblance of their attributes and powers, more plainly demonſtrates, that time is nothing.

From this non-exiſtence of time thus eſtabliſhed, many concluſions will ariſe, both uſeful and entertaining; from whence perhaps new lights may be thrown on ſeveral ſpeculations religious and metaphyſical, whoſe outlines I ſhall juſt venture to trace, and leave them to be filled up by abler pens.

1ſt. If time be no more than the ſucceſſion of ideas, and actions, however theſe may be accelerated or retarded, time will be juſt the ſame: that is, neither longer or ſhorter, provided the ſame ideas and actions ſucceed one another, as far, I mean, as it relates to beings ſo thinking and acting. For inſtance, were the earth and all the celeſtial bodies to perform the ſame revolutions in one day, which they now perform in a whole year, and were all the ideas, actions, and lives of mankind haſtened on in the ſame proportion, the period of our lives would not be in the leaſt ſhortened; but that day would be exactly equal to the preſent year: if in the ſpace of ſeventy or eighty of theſe days a man was born, educated, and grown up, had exerciſed a profeſſion, had ſeen his children come to maturity, his grandchildren ſucceed them, and, during this period, had had all his ideas and actions, all his enjoyments and ſufferings, accelerated in the

the ſame proportion, he would not only ſeem to himſelf, and to all who lived in the ſame ſtate with him, and meaſured time by the ſame ſtandard, to have lived as long, but actually and in fact would have lived as long as one who reſides on this globe as great a number of our preſent years.

2dly. This being the caſe, it follows, that the life of every man muſt be longer or ſhorter, in proportion to the number of his thoughts and actions; for was it poſſible for a man to think and act as much in an hour as in a year, that hour, as far as it related to him, would not only ſeem, but actually become a year. On the other hand, was it poſſible for a man totally to abſtain from thinking and acting for an hour, or a year, time, with regard to him, for that period, would have no exiſtence; or, could he keep one idea fixed in his mind, and continue one ſingle act during the ſame ſpace, time, which is a ſucceſſion only of ideas and actions, muſt be equally annihilated: whether theſe ideas and actions are exerciſed on great or little occaſions, whether they are productive of pleaſing or painful ſenſations, with regard to this purpoſe their effects will be the ſame; neither their importance or conſequences will add any thing to time, but their numbers and celerity moſt undoubtedly will. Our lives, therefore, when diverſified with a variety of objects, and buſied in a multiplicity of purſuits, though perhaps leſs happy, will certainly

certainly be longer than when doſed away in ſloth, inactivity, and apathy.

3dly. From hence it is evident, that we can form no judgment of the duration of the lives, enjoyments, and ſufferings of other animals, with the progreſſion of whoſe ideas we are totally unacquainted, and who may be framed in that reſpect, as well as in many others, ſo widely different from ourſelves. The gaudy butterfly, that flutters in the ſunſhine but for a few months, may live as long as the ſtupid tortoiſe that breathes for a century; the inſect, that ſurvives not one diurnal revolution of the ſun, may, for any thing we know, enjoy an age of happineſs; and the miſerable horſe, that appears to us to ſuffer the drudgery of ten or twenty years, may finiſh his laborious taſk in as many months, days or hours.

4thly. For the like reaſons we can judge but very imperfectly of what are real evils in the univerſal ſyſtem, whilſt we remain in this temporal ſtate of exiſtence, in which all things are exhibited to us by ſcraps, one after the other; for theſe detached portions, which viewed ſeparately, ſeem but miſſhapen blotches, may to beings, who in an eternal ſtate ſee paſt, preſent, and future, all delineated on one canvaſs, appear as well-diſpoſed ſhades neceſſary to render perfect the whole moſt beautiful landſcape. Nay, even pain, that taken ſingly is ſo pungent and diſagreeable a potion, when thrown into the cup of univerſal happineſs, may, perhaps,

add

add to it a flavour, which without this infuſion it could not have acquired.

5thly. If time has itſelf no exiſtence, it can never put an end to the exiſtence of any thing elſe; and this ſeems no inconcluſive argument for the immortality of the ſoul; for if any thing is, and no cauſe appears to us why it ſhould ceaſe to be, we can have no good reaſon to believe that it will not continue. Whatever has no connection with time muſt be eternal: now the only property of the ſoul, with which we are acquainted, is thought, which bears no relation to time; whence it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the ſoul itſelf is equally unconnected with it, and conſequently eternal. Even in material beings we ſee continual mutations, but can perceive no ſymptoms of annihilation; and therefore we have ſurely leſs cauſe to ſuſpect it in immaterial: from whence I am inclined to think, that the eſſences of all things are eternal, that is, unrelative to time, and that it is only our manner of perceiving them, that cauſes them to appear temporal to us; paſt, preſent, and future being not inherent in their natures, but only in our progreſſive mode of perception.

6thly. From what has been ſaid, we may perceive into what amazing abſurdities many of our ableſt divines and metaphyſicians have plunged, in their inveſtigations of eternity; for making which their receipt is uſually this: they take of time a ſufficient quantity, and, chopping it in ſmall pieces, they diſpoſe

diſpoſe them in imaginary lengths, which they diſtinguiſh by the names of minutes, hours, days, years, and ages; then feeling in their own minds a power of multiplying theſe as often as they think fit, they heap millions upon millions; and finding this power to be a machine that may be worked backwards and forwards with equal facility, they extend their line both ways, and ſo their eternity is compleated, and fit for uſe: they then divide it in the middle, and out of a ſingle eternity they make two, as they term them, *a parte ante*, and *a parte poſt*; each of which having one end, may be drawn out, like a juggler's ribband, as long as they pleaſe. The contradictions ſo manifeſt in this ſyſtem, ſufficiently declare its falſhood; for in adopting it we muſt acknowledge, that each half of this eternity is equal to the whole; that in each the number of days cannot exceed that of the months, nor the month be more numerous than the years, they being all alike infinite; that whether it commenced yeſterday, or ten thouſand years ſince, the length of its duration muſt be the ſame; for the length depends not on the beginning, but on the end, but that cannot be different where there is no end at all: the abſurdity of all theſe propoſitions is too glaring to ſtand in need of any refutation; for it is evident, that whatever contains parts, length, or numbers, can never be infinite; whatever had a beginning muſt have an end, becauſe beginning and ending are the modes of temporary exiſtence:

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what has no end could have no beginning, becauſe both are equally inconſiſtent with eternity. In truth, all theſe abſurdities ariſe from applying to eternity our ideas of time, which, being two modes of exiſtence intirely different, bear not the leaſt relation to each other: time is in its nature finite and ſucceſſive; eternity infinite and inſtantaneous; and therefore their properties are no more applicable to each other, than thoſe of ſounds to colours, or of colours to ſounds; and we can no more form eternity out of time, than, by mixing red, blue, and green, we can compoſe an anthem or an opera.

7thly. From hence appears the neceſſity, in our conſiderations on theſe ſubjects, of keeping our ideas of thoſe two modes of exiſtence intirely and conſtantly diſtinct, as they themſelves are in nature; by which means we ſhall preſently ſweep away many of thoſe theological and metaphyſical cobwebs, which now encumber and diſgrace our moſt learned libraries; and cut ſhort many impertinent enquiries concerning the creation of the univerſe, God's foreknowledge and predeſtination, the præ-exiſtent and future ſtate of ſouls, the injuſtice of eternal puniſhments, and the ſleep of the ſoul, with numberleſs others of the ſame kind, all derived from injudiciouſly blending and confounding theſe two kinds of exiſtence together, and applying notions and expreſſions to one, which can only with propriety belong to the other.

To enter largely into theſe abſtruſe and intricate ſubjects, would require a folio; I ſhall therefore only ſay one word or two to each.

It has been frequently aſked, why God created the univerſe at the time in which he did create it, and why he ſuffered millions of ages to paſs away before the commencement of ſo glorious a work? To this it may be replied with equal conciſeneſs and truth, that in fact no ſuch ages ever did or could paſs before it was created; nor was it created in any time at all; for neither the eſſence or actions of God have the moſt diſtant relation to time; he has been pleaſed in his infinite wiſdom to beſtow on ſome parts of his creation a temporal mode of exiſtence, and from this alone time derives its origin: to ſuppoſe time antecedent to temporal exiſtence, is to ſuppoſe effects to precede their cauſes; and not leſs abſurd than to imagine, that there could be perception before ſenſitive beings, or thought before intelligent beings exiſted. This very queſtion proves the abſurdity of connecting time and eternity together; for if God's power of creating is coæval with his exiſtence, that exiſtence eternal, and that eternity only time extended; this evident contradiction follows, that God, though always equally able, yet in fact never could create any thing ſo ſoon, but that he might have created it ſooner: that is in other words, that he never could create any thing as ſoon

as

as he could. All this puzzle ariſes from our fooliſhly ſuppoſing, that eternal and temporal beings muſt act in a manner ſimilar to each other: if we do any thing, it muſt be done at ſome time or other; but God acts in ways as different from ours, as inconceivable to us; his ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts: one day is to him as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day; that is, neither of them, with his manner of exiſting, thinking, or acting, have any connection whatever.

All diſputes about God's foreknowledge and predeſtination, are of the ſame ſpecies, and derive their birth entirely from the ſame abſurd ſuppoſition. Foreknowledge and predeſtination imply ſucceſſion, and are relative to time, which has no relation to the eſſence or perception of the Creator of all things; and therefore, in the ſenſe uſually applied to them, cannot with any propriety be attributed to him. He knows all things, and ordains all things; but as all things are equally preſent to the divine intuition, it is impoſſible that he can foreknow or predeſtinate any thing.

Of the ſame kind are all queſtions concerning the præ-exiſtent and future ſtate of the ſoul, ariſing likewiſe from confounding our ideas of theſe two modes of exiſtence, temporal and eternal: whenever the ſoul is united with the body, perceiving all things by ſucceſſion through material organs, it ac-

quires ideas of time, and can form none of exiſtence unconnected with it; but whenever this union is diſſolved, it probably returns again to its native mode of eternal exiſtence, in which the whole circle of its perception being at once viſible, it has nothing further to do with time; it is neither old nor young, it lives no more in the ſeventeenth than in the ſeventh century, no nearer to the end than the beginning of the world: all ideas of years and ages, of præ-exiſtence and futurity, of beginning and ending, will be totally obliterated; and poſſibly it will be as incapable of forming any conceptions of time, as it is now of eternity. The ſoul, therefore, being quite unconnected with time, whenever it is unconnected with a body, cannot properly be ſaid to exiſt in another time, either prior or poſterior, but only in another manner.

Every argument alſo endeavouring to prove the injuſtice and diſproportion of eternal puniſhments for temporal offences, is founded on the ſame erroneous principles, and admits of the ſame anſwer; that all computations of the magnitude of ſuch puniſhments from their duration, by heaping years and ages upon each other, are abſurd, and inconſiſtent with that ſtate in which they are to be inflicted: crimes will there be puniſhed according to the degrees of their malignity, but neither for a long, or a ſhort, nor for any time at all: for all puniſhments muſt be correſpondent to the ſtate in which they are ſuffered: in an eternal ſtate, they muſt be

be eternal, in a temporal they muſt be temporal; for it is equally impoſſible, that a being can be puniſhed for a time, where no time is, as that it ſhould be puniſhed everlaſtingly in a ſtate which itſelf cannot laſt. As therefore, from the nature of things, this diſpenſation is neceſſary, it cannot be unjuſt, and from the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of the Author of nature, we may reaſonably preſume that it cannot be diſproportioned to its ſeveral objects.

The non-entity of time will ſerve likewiſe to ſettle a late ingenious controverſy, and ſhew, that, like moſt others of the kind, it is a diſpute only upon words: this controverſy is concerning the ſleep of the ſoul; that is, whether it enters into a ſtate of happineſs or miſery immediately on its diſſolution from the body, or remains in a ſtate of profound inſenſibility till the general judgment, and then receives its final ſentence, and ſuffers its execution: for if time is nothing but the thoughts and actions which paſs in it, the condition of the ſoul, whether it ſleeps or not, will be exactly the ſame; nor will the final ſentence be one moment deferred by ſuch a ſtate of inſenſibility, how long ſoever it may continue; for though, during that period, many revolutions of the ſun, and of empires, may take place, many millions of thoughts and actions may paſs, which not only meaſure time, but create it; yet with regard to the ſoul ſo ſleeping, none of theſe, that is, no time will paſs at all; and

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if no time intervenes, judgment, however remote with regard to others, will as inſtantly follow its diſſolution, as if that had happened the precedent moment. But if, according to the foregoing principles, the ſoul in a ſeparate ſtate bears no relation to time, then no event in which it is there concerned can be before or after another, either nearer or farther from any period, from death or judgment, from the creation or diſſolution of this planetary ſyſtem: this we ſee muſt at once put an end to all diſputes on this ſubject, and render the uſe of ſoporifics entirely needleſs.

After all that has been here advanced, I am not inſenſible, that we are here ſo conſtantly converſant with temporal objects, and ſo totally unacquainted with eternal, that few, very few, will ever be able to abſtract exiſtence from time, or comprehend that any thing can exiſt out of, and unconnected with it: in vain ſhould I ſuggeſt, that the various planets are peopled by the divine wiſdom with a variety of beings, and even this terreſtrial globe with innumerable creatures, whoſe ſituations are ſo different, that their manner of exiſtence is quite unknown and incomprehenſible to each other; that millions inhabit the impenetrable receſſes of the unfathomable ocean, who can no more form conceptions of any exiſtence beyond the limits of that their native element, than we ourſelves can beyond the boundaries of time; and

and that therefore in reality, time may be no more neceſſary to exiſtence than water, though the mode of that exiſtence we are unable to comprehend. But, I well know, theſe analogous arguments have little weight; the prejudice of education, the ſtrength of habit, and the force of language, all formed on the ſuppoſed union of exiſtence with time, will perſuade men to reject this hypotheſis as vain and chimerical. To all buſy men, and men of buſineſs, to all jogging on in the beaten roads of profeſſions or ſcrambling up the precipices of ambition, theſe conſiderations muſt appear unprofitable illuſions, if not incomprehenſible nonſenſe; for to endeavour to convince a merchant ſubſiſting on long credit, a lawyer enriched by delay, a divine who has purchaſed a next preſentation, a general who is in no hurry to fight, or a miniſter whoſe object is the continuance of his power, that time is nothing, is an arduous taſk, and very unlikely to be attended with ſucceſs. Whoever deſires to taſte or underſtand ſuch abſtracted ſpeculations, muſt leave for a while the noiſy buſtle of worldly occupations, and retire into the ſequeſtered ſhades of ſolitude and contemplation: from whence he will return certainly not richer, poſſibly not wiſer, but probably more ſuſceptible of amuſement from his own company for want of better, and more able to draw entertainment from his own imagi-

nations;

nations; which in his journey through life he will often find an acquiſition not altogether inconſiderable.

DISQUISITION V.

ON THE ANALOGY BETWEEN THINGS MATERIAL AND INTELLECTUAL.

AS all things, both material and intellectual, are derived from the ſame omnipotent author, we ſhall find, on an accurate examination, that there is a certain analogy, which runs through them all, well worthy of our attention and admiration; that is, that there are in the elements of the material world, and in the paſſions and actions of mankind, powers and propenſities of a ſimilar nature, which operate in a ſimilar manner, throughout every part of the material, moral, and political ſyſtem. But this theory, rather abſtruſe, is difficult to be explained, and will be beſt elucidated by examples, which every day fall within our obſervation.

In the material world, for inſtance, we ſee all diſorders cured by their own exceſſes: a ſultry calm fails not to produce a ſtorm, which diſſipates the noxious vapours, and reſtores a purer air; the fierceſt tempeſt, exhauſted by its own violence, at length ſubſides

ſides; and an intenſe ſun-ſhine, whilſt it parches up the thirſty earth, exhales clouds, which quickly water it with refreſhing ſhowers. Juſt ſo in the moral world, all our paſſions and vices, by their exceſſes, defeat themſelves; exceſſive rage renders men impotent to execute the miſchiefs which they threaten; repeated treacheries make them unable to deceive, becauſe none will truſt them; and extreme profligacy, by the diſeaſes which it occaſions, deſtroys their appetites, and works an unwilling reformation.

As in the natural world, the elements are reſtrained in their moſt deſtructive effects, by their mutual oppoſition; ſo in the moral, are the vices of mankind prevented from being totally ſubverſive of ſociety, by their continually counteracting each other: profuſion reſtores to the public the wealth which avarice has detained from it for a time; envy clips the towering wings of ambition; and even revenge, by its terrors, prevents many injuries and oppreſſions: the treachery of the thief diſcovers his accomplices; the perfidy of the proſtitute brings the highwayman to juſtice; and the villainy of the aſſaſſin puts an end to the cruelty of a tyrant.

In the material world, the middle climates, fartheſt removed from the extremes of heat and cold, are the moſt ſalubrious and moſt pleaſant: ſo in life, the middle ranks are ever moſt favourable to virtue, and to happineſs; which dwell not in the extremes of poverty or riches.

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As throughout the various regions of the earth, advantages and inconveniences are diſtributed with a more impartial hand than we on a tranſitory view are apt to imagine; ſo are they to the various conditions of human life: if the more ſouthern climates are gilded with a brighter ſun-ſhine, perfumed with more fragrant gales, and decorated with a greater profuſion of plants and flowers, they are at the ſame time perpetually expoſed to peſtilential heats, infeſted with noxious animals, torn by hurricanes, and rocked by earthquakes, unknown to the rougher regions of the north. In like manner, if the rich enjoy luxuries, from which the poor are debarred, they ſuffer many diſeaſes and diſquietudes, from which thoſe are fortunately exempted.

We behold with admiration the vivid azure of the vaulted ſky, and variegated colours of the diſtant clouds; but, if we approach them on the ſummit of ſome lofty mountain, we diſcover that the beauteous ſcene is all illuſion, and find ourſelves involved only in a dreary fog or a tempeſtuous whirlwind: juſt ſo, in youth, we look up with pleaſing expectation to the pleaſures and honours, which we fondly imagine will attend maturer age; at which, if we arrive, the brilliant proſpect vaniſhes in diſappointment, and we meet with nothing more than a dull inactivity or turbulent contentions.

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The properties of the various ſeaſons of the year, the gaiety of ſpring, the vigour of ſummer, the ſerenity of autumn, and the gloom of winter, have been ſo often aſſimilated to the correſponding periods of human life; the dangers and diſquietudes of grandeur ſo often compared to the tempeſtuous ſituation of lofty mountains; and the quiet ſafety of inferior ſtations, to the calm ſecurity of the humbler vale, that a repetition of them here would be impertinent, and uſeleſs; yet they all contribute to point out that analogy which uniformly pervades every part of the creation with which we are acquainted.

Between the material and political world, this analogy is ſtill more conſpicuous: in the former, every particle of matter, of which the vaſt machine is compoſed, is actuated by that wonderful principle of attraction, which reſtrains, impels, and directs its progreſs to the deſtined end; in the latter, every individual of which the great political body is formed, is actuated by ſelf-intereſt, a principle exactly ſimilar, which, by a conſtant endeavour to draw all things to itſelf, reſtrains, impels, and directs his paſſions, deſigns, and actions to the important ends of government and ſociety. As the firſt operates with force in proportion to the contents of the body in which it reſides, ſo does the latter; in individuals it is ſmall, in ſocieties greater, and in populous and extenſive

ſive empires moſt powerful. As the one acts with power in proportion to its diſtance, ſo does the other; for we conſtantly find, that a ſmall benefit beſtowed on men as individuals, will influence them much more than a larger, which they may receive from national proſperity; and a trifling loſs, which immediately affects themſelves, is more regretted, than one more conſiderable, which they feel only through the medium of public calamities. In another reſpect, alſo, they greatly reſemble each other; they are both productive of many miſchiefs, yet both neceſſary to the well-being and preſervation of the whole. It is attraction that plunges us in the ocean; daſhes us againſt the rocks; tumbles us from the precipice; and pulls down the tottering fabric on our heads: but it is this, alſo, that conſtitutes all body, that binds together the terreſtrial globe, guides the revolving planets in their courſes, and without it not only the whole material ſyſtem would be diſſolved, but I am inclined to think, that matter itſelf muſt be annihilated; for, matter being infinitely diviſible, without this property it muſt be infinitely divided; and infinite diviſion ſeems to be nothing leſs than annihilation; for without attraction there could be no coheſion, without coheſion no ſolidity, and without ſolidity no matter. In like manner, ſelf-intereſt, or what we miſtake for it, is the ſource of all our crimes, and moſt of our ſufferings. It

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is this that ſeduces the profligate, by the proſpect of pleaſure; tempts the villain by the hopes of gain; and bribes the hero with the voice of fame: but it is this alſo that is the ſource of all our connections, civil, religious, political, and commercial; that binds us together in families, in cities, and in nations, and directs our united labours to the public benefit: and without its influence, arts and learning, trade and manufactures, would be at an end, and all government, like matter by infinite diviſion, would be annihilated.

The natural world ſubſiſts by a perpetual contention of the elements of which it is compoſed, the political by as conſtant a conteſt of its internal parties, ſtruggling for ſuperiority. In the former, the great ſyſtem is carried on by a continual rotation of good and evil, alternately producing, and ſucceeding each other: continued ſunſhine produces tempeſts; theſe diſcharge themſelves in refreſhing rains; rains cauſe inundations, which, after ſome ravages, ſubſiding, aſſiſt commerce and agriculture, by ſcouring out the beds of rivers, and fertilizing lands; and ſunſhine returns again: ſo in the latter, long peace, the political ſunſhine, generates corruption, luxury, and faction, the parents of deſtructive wars; war for a time awakens national vigour, and pours down wealth and plunder, then cauſes inundations of poverty and diſtreſs; diſtreſs calls forth induſ-

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try, agriculture, and commerce, and peace returns once more.

As night and day, winter and ſummer, are alternately circulated over the various regions of the globe; ſo are poverty and wealth, idleneſs and induſtry, ignorance and ſcience, deſpotiſm and liberty, by an uniform proceſs ariſing from their own natural conſtitutions, and their invariable effects upon each other. In poor countries, neceſſity incites induſtry, and cheapneſs of proviſions invites traders and manufacturers to reſide; this ſoon introduces wealth, learning, and liberty; and theſe are as ſoon followed by profuſion, faction and licentiouſneſs; commerce will keep no ſuch company, but, like a bird of paſſage, migrates to climes by poverty and cheapneſs better adapted to her conſtitution: theſe, in their turns, grow rich, civilized, free, diſſolute, and licentious in the ſame manner, and are ſucceſſively deſerted for the ſame reaſon, and the ſame circle is again renewed.

In the material world, the conſtant circulation of the air, and flux and reflux of the tides, preſerve thoſe elements from a putrid ſtagnation; ſo in the political, controverſies, civil and religious, keep up the ſpirits of national communities, and prevent them from ſinking into a ſtate of indolence and ignorance: but if either exceed the bounds of moderation, their conſequences are extremely fatal; the former producing ſtorms and inundations, and the latter anarchy and confuſion.

ſion. Lord Bacon obſerves, that war is to ſtates, what exerciſe is to individuals; and in this they are extremely ſimilar; a proper proportion may contribute to health and vigour, but too much emaciates and wears out a conſtitution.

Thus by a wiſe and wonderful diſpoſition of things material and intellectual, God has infuſed into them all powers and propenſities greatly analogous, by which they are enabled and compelled, in a ſimilar manner, to perform their reſpective parts in the general ſyſtem, to reſtrain their own exceſſes, and to call back each other, whenever they too far deviate from their deſtined ends; and has ſaid unto every thing, as well as to the ocean, to night and day, to winter and ſummer, to heat and cold, to rain and ſunſhine, to happineſs and miſery, to ſcience and ignorance, to war and peace, to liberty and deſpotiſm, "Hitherto ſhalt thou go, and no farther." Theſe amazing inſtances of infinite wiſdom in the œconomy of things, preſenting every where an analogy ſo remarkable, are well worthy of our higheſt admiration; yet have been but little obſerved, becauſe theſe divine diſpoſitions appear to us to be no more than the neceſſary conſequences of previous cauſes, and the invariable operations of nature, and we forget that nature is nothing more than the art of her omnipotent author.

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DISQUISITION VI.

ON RATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

TO ſeveral learned and ingenious writers, ſome doctrines of the Chriſtian religion have appeared ſo contradictory to all the principles of reaſon and equity, that they cannot aſſent to them, nor believe, that they can be derived from the fountain of all truth, and juſtice. In order, therefore, to ſatisfy themſelves and others, who may labour under the ſame difficulties, they have undertaken the arduous taſk of reconciling revelation and reaſon; and great would have been their merits, had they begun at the right end, that is, had they endeavoured to exalt the human underſtanding to the comprehenſion of the ſublime doctrines of the goſpel, rather than to reduce thoſe doctrines to the low ſtandard of human reaſon; but, unfortunately for themſelves and many others, they have made choice of the latter method, and, as the ſhorteſt way to effect it, have with inconſiderate raſhneſs expunged from the New Teſtament every divine declaration, which agrees not exactly with their own notions of truth and rectitude; and this they have attempted by no other means, than by abſurd explanations, or by bold aſſertions that they are not there, in direct contradiction

diction to the ſenſe of language, and the whole tenour of thoſe writings; as ſome philoſophers have ventured, in oppoſition to all men's ſenſes, and even their own, to deny the exiſtence of matter, for no other reaſon, but becauſe they find in it properties which they are unable to account for. Thus they have reduced Chriſtianity to a mere ſyſtem of ethics, and retain no part of it but the moral, which in fact is no characteriſtic part of it at all, as this, though in a manner leſs perfect, makes a part of every religion which ever appeared in the world. This ingenious method of converting Chriſtianity into Deiſm, cannot fail of acquiring many reſpectable proſelytes; for every virtuous and pious man, who would be a Chriſtian if he could, that is, who reverences the name of Chriſtianity, but cannot aſſent to its tenets, is glad to liſt under the ſtandard of any leader, who can teach him to be a Chriſtian, without believing any one principle of that inſtitution.

Whoever will look back into the theological annals of this country, will find, that during the laſt century, the faſhionable philoſophers were for the moſt part Atheiſts, who aſcribed every thing to chance, fate, or neceſſity; excluſive of all intelligence or deſign: theſe mighty giants, who fought againſt Heaven, being, at length overthrown by the abſurdity of their own principles, and the ſuperior abilities of their adverſaries, retreated

about the beginning of the preſent, to the more tenable fort of Deiſm; but here again, being frequently worſted, they at laſt took ſhelter under the covert-way of rational Chriſtianity, where they now make their ſtand, and attack revelation with leſs odium, and more ſucceſs, than from the open plains of profeſſed Deiſm, becauſe many are ready to reject the whole ſubſtance of the Chriſtian inſtitution, who would be ſhocked at the thought of relinquiſhing the name.

If Chriſtianity is to be learned out of the New Teſtament, and words have any meaning affixed to them, the fundamental principles of it are theſe—That mankind come into this world in a depraved and fallen condition;—that they are placed here for a while, to give them an opportunity to work out their ſalvation, that is, by a virtuous and pious life to purge off this guilt and depravity, and recover their loſt ſtate of happineſs and innocence, in a future life;—that this they are unable to perform, without the grace and aſſiſtance of God;—and that after their beſt endeavours, they cannot hope for pardon from their own merits, but only from the merits of Chriſt, and the atonement made for their tranſgreſſions by his ſufferings and death. This is clearly the ſum and ſubſtance of the Chriſtian diſpenſation; and ſo adverſe is it to all the principles of human reaſon, that, if brought before her tribunal, it muſt inevitably be condemned.

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If we give no credit to its divine authority, any attempt to reconcile them is uſeleſs; and, if we believe it, preſumptuous in the higheſt degree. To prove the reaſonableneſs of a revelation, is in fact to deſtroy it; becauſe a revelation implies information of ſomething which reaſon cannot diſcover, and therefore muſt be different from its deductions, or it would be no revelation. If God had told us, that we come into this world in a ſtate of perfect innocence, void of all propenſities to evil; that our depravity proceeds entirely from the abuſe of that free-will, with which he has been pleaſed to endue us; that, if in this life we purſue a virtuous conduct, we have a right to be rewarded, and if a vicious, we may expect to be puniſhed in another, except we prevent it by repentance and reformation, and that theſe are always in our own power—if God had informed us of nothing more, this would have been no revelation, becauſe it is juſt what our reaſon, properly employed, might have taught us; but if he has thought proper, by ſupernatural means, to aſſure us, that our ſituation, our relations, our depravity, our merits, and our powers, are all of a kind extremely different from what we imagine; and that his diſpenſations towards us are founded on principles which cannot be explained to us, becauſe, in our preſent ſtate, we are unable to comprehend them; this is a revelation, which we may believe, or not,

according to our opinion of its authority; but let us not reaſon it into no revelation at all.

The writers of the New Teſtament frequently declare, that the religion which they teach, is a myſtery, that is, a revelation of the diſpenſations of God to mankind, which without ſupernatural information we never could have diſcovered; thus St. Paul ſays, "Having made known to us the myſtery "of his will." What then is the myſtery? not the moral precepts of the goſpel; for they are no more a myſtery than the Ethics of Ariſtotle, or the Offices of Cicero: the myſtery conſiſts alone in theſe very doctrines, which the Rationaliſt explodes, becauſe they diſagree with the concluſions of his reaſon; that is, becauſe they are myſteries, as they are avowed to be by thoſe who taught them.

But theſe bold advocates for reaſon, underſtand not its extent, its powers, or the proper application of them. The utmoſt perfection of human reaſon, is the knowledge of its own defects, and the limits of its own confined powers, which are extremely narrow. It is a lamp which ſerves us very well for the common occupations of life, which are near at hand, but can ſhew us no proſpect at a diſtance: on all ſpeculative ſubjects, it is exceedingly fallacious, but in none ſo frequently miſleads us, as in our religious and political inquiries;

inquiries; becauſe, in the former, we draw concluſions without premiſes; and in the latter, upon falſe ones. Thus, for inſtance, reaſon tells us, that a Creator, infinitely powerful and good, could never permit any evil, natural or moral, to have a place in his works; becauſe his goodneſs muſt induce him, and his power enable him, to exclude them: this argument is unanſwerable by any thing but experience, which every hour confutes it. Thus again, reaſon aſſures us, that ſufferings, though they may be juſt puniſhments for paſt crimes, and a means to prevent them for the future, can never be compenſations for them; much leſs can the ſufferings of one being atone for their guilt of another; againſt this no objection can be urged, except the belief of mankind, in all ages and nations, and the expreſs declarations of revelation; which unanimouſly contradict it, and afford ſufficient grounds for our concurrence. In theſe two inſtances we are deceived by miſapplying our reaſon to ſubjects in which we have no premiſes to reaſon upon; for, being totally ignorant on what plan the univerſal ſyſtem is formed and ſupported, we can be no judges of what is good or evil with regard to the whole; and, as we know not for what ends either guilt or ſufferings were ever admitted, we muſt be unable to comprehend what connections between them may poſſibly be derived from thoſe ends. In our political diſcuſſions, reaſon equally miſleads

miſleads us; in theſe, ſhe preſents us with ſchemes of government, in which, by the moſt admirable contrivances, juſtice is ſo impartially adminiſtered, property ſo well guarded, and liberty ſo effectually ſecured, that in theory it ſeems impoſſible, that any people under ſuch wiſe regulations can poſſibly fail of being happy, virtuous, and free; but experiment ſoon convinces us, that they are inadequate to theſe ſalutary purpoſes, and that, in practice, they are productive only of anarchy and confuſion. Here our errors ariſe from reaſoning on falſe premiſes, that is, from ſuppoſing that mankind will act on principles incompatible with the vices, the follies, and the paſſions of human nature. If reaſon, therefore, is ſo fallible a judge in the little and low concerns of human policy, with which ſhe is daily converſant, how abſurd is the Rationaliſt, who conſtitutes her ſole arbiter in the diſcuſſions of the moſt ſublime ſubjects, of which ſhe has not the leaſt comprehenſion, the attributes and diſpenſations of the Almighty, our relations to him, and our connections with paſt and future ſtates of exiſtence!

Of all men, who are called Chriſtians, the Rationaliſt ſeems to have the leaſt pretence to that denomination: the Church of England acknowledges the belief of all the doctrines of this inſtitution in her articles, though in them they are ill explained, and worſe expreſſed; the Church of Rome aſ-

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ſents to them all, but adds many without ſufficient authority; the Calviniſt denies them not, but diſgraces them by harſh, obſcure, and abſurd comments; the Quaker admits them, but is bewildered by enthuſiaſtic notions of partial inſpirations; and the Methodiſt ſubſcribes to them all with the utmoſt veneration, but (inconſiſtently) depreciates the merit of moral duties, at the ſame time that he inſiſts on the practice of the moſt rigid; but the Rationaliſt reprobates the whole, as impious, ridiculous, and contradictory to the juſtice of God, and the reaſon of man. Nor is he leſs adverſe to the ſpirit, than to the letter of this religion: the true Chriſtian is humble, teachable, and diffident; the Rationaliſt is aſſuming, obſtinate, and ſelf-ſufficient: the Chriſtian hopeth all things; feareth all things, and believeth all things, the Rationaliſt hopeth for nothing, but from his own merits, feareth nothing from his own depravity, and believeth nothing, the grounds of which he cannot perfectly underſtand. Why then muſt he be a Chriſtian? no man is now compelled to come in, nor more obliged to be a Chriſtian, than a Free-maſon; the belief of it is not neceſſary to his advancement in life, nor his progreſs in any profeſſion; we know that he may be a lawyer, a phyſician, or even a divine, without it. If, on an impartial enquiry, he is a religious and moral Deiſt, why not own it? Such were Socrates, Plato, and Cicero;

Cicero; and it is ſtill a character by no means diſgraceful to a virtuous man. I blame no one for want of faith, but for want of ſincerity; not for being no Chriſtian, but for pretending to be one, without believing. The profeſſed Deiſt gives Chriſtianity fair play; if ſhe cannot defend herſelf, let her fall; but the rational Chriſtian aſſaſſinates her in the dark: the firſt attacks Chriſt, as did the multitude, with ſwords and ſtaves; the latter, like Judas, betrays him with a kiſs.

DISQUISITION VII.

ON GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL LIBERTY.

IF any one caſts his eye on the title of this eſſay, ſhort as it is, he will ſcarcely be perſuaded to read any farther; as he will rationally conclude, that, on a ſubject ſo hackneyed by the beſt and worſt writers of all ages, from Ariſtotle to the newſpaper politicians of the preſent times, nothing can be added, which can afford either inſtruction or entertainment: but ſo many abſurd principles, concerning government and liberty, have of late been diſſeminated with unuſual induſtry; principles as falſe as miſchievous, as inconſiſtent

conſiſtent with common ſenſe as with all human ſociety; that it ſeems neceſſary that they ſhould not paſs quite unnoticed, eſpecially as they require nothing more, than to be fairly ſtated, to be refuted. The moſt conſiderable of them are the following; to each of which I ſhall ſay a few words.

1ſt. That all men are born equal.

2dly. That all men are born free.

3dly. That all government is derived from the people.

4thly. That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed.

5thly. That no government ought to laſt any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the two contracting parties; that is, to the governed, as to the governors.

Firſt then; that all men are born equal; by which propoſition, if it is only meant, that all men are equally born, that is, that one man is as much born as another, I ſhall not diſpute its truth: but in every other ſenſe it is entirely falſe; for we daily ſee, that ſome are born with beautiful and healthy bodies, and ſome with frames diſtorted, and filled with the moſt deplorable diſeaſes; ſome with minds fraught with the ſeeds of wiſdom and genius, others with thoſe of idiotiſm and madneſs; ſome, by the laws and conſtitution of their countries, are born to the inheritance of affluent fortunes and

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diſtinguiſhed honours, others to a life of poverty, labour, and obſcurity. How theſe can be ſaid to be born equal, I cannot comprehend. If by this propoſition is to be underſtood, that, at the time of their birth, all men are poſſeſſed of an equal ſhare of power, wealth, wiſdom, learning, and virtue; when they are equally incapable of poſſeſſing any; this would be no leſs ridiculous, than to aſſert, that all men are born with teeth of the ſame length, when none of them are born with any teeth at all. But ſuppoſing they were all born equal; would this prove, what is always intended to be proved by it, that they ought always to continue ſo? or can any argument be drawn from thence, againſt their future inequality and ſubordination? muſt no man preſume to be ſix feet high, becauſe, perhaps, he was born of the ſame ſize as another, who is now but four? muſt no man aſſume power over another, becauſe they were born equal, that is, becauſe at their birth they were both incapable of exerciſing any power whatever? Thus, we ſee, this mighty argument, drawn from the ſuppoſed natural equality of mankind, by which all powers and principalities are threatened to be overthrown, is entirely falſe, and if true, is nothing to the purpoſe for which is has been ſo often and ſo pompouſly introduced.

Secondly; That all men are born free. This is ſo far from being true, that the firſt infringe-

infringement of this liberty is being born at all; which is impoſed upon them, without their conſent, given either by themſelves or their repreſentatives; and it may eaſily be ſhewn, that man, by the conſtitution of his nature, never ſubſiſts a free and independent being, from the firſt to the laſt moment of his reſidence on this terreſtrial globe: where, during the firſt nine months of his exiſtence, he is confined in a dark and ſultry priſon, debarred from light and air; till at length, by an Habeas Corpus brought by the hand of ſome kind deliverer, he is ſet at liberty: but what kind of liberty does he then enjoy? he is bound hand and foot, and fed upon bread and water, for as long a period; no ſooner is he unbound, than he makes ſo bad a uſe of his liberty, that it becomes neceſſary that he ſhould be placed in a ſtate of the ſevereſt diſcipline, firſt under a nurſe, and then a ſchoolmaſter, both equal tyrants in their ſeveral departments; by whom he is again confined without law, condemned without a jury, and whipped without mercy. In this ſtate of ſlavery he continues many years, and at the expiration of it, he is obliged to commence an involuntary ſubject of ſome civil government; to whoſe authority he muſt ſubmit, however ingeniouſly he may diſpute her right, or be juſtly hanged for diſobedience to her laws. And this is the ſum total of human liberty. Perhaps it may be ſaid, that all this may be ingenious ridicule, but

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cannot be intended for ſerious argument; to which I reply, that it is the moſt ſerious argument that can be offered, becauſe it is derived from the works, and the will of our Creator; and evidently ſhews, that man was never deſigned by him to be an independent and ſelf-governed being, but to be trained up in a ſtate of ſubordination and government in the preſent life, to fit him for one more perfect in another: and, if it was not a reflection too ſerious, I ſhould add, that, in the numerous catalogue of human vices, there is not one which ſo compleatly diſqualifies him from being a member of that celeſtial community, as a factious and turbulent diſpoſition, and an impatience of controul; which frequently aſſumes the honourable title of the love of liberty.

Thirdly; That all government is derived from the people. This is another fallacious propoſition; which in one ſenſe is true, but, with regard to the principles ſo often eſtabliſhed upon it, entirely falſe. It is true, indeed, that all government is ſo far derived from the people, that there could be no government if there were no people to be governed: if there were no ſubjects there could be no kings, nor parliaments if there were no conſtituents, nor ſhepherds if there were no ſheep; but the inference uſually drawn from this propoſition is utterly falſe, which is, that, becauſe all government is derived from the people, the people have a

right

right to reſume it, and adminiſter it themſelves, whenever they pleaſe. But whatever claim they may have to this right, the exerciſe of it is impracticable, from the very nature of government; for all government muſt conſiſt of the governors, and the governed; if the people at large are the governors, where ſhall we be able to find the governed? All government is power, with which ſome are intruſted, to controul the actions of others; but how is it poſſible that every man ſhould have a power to controul the actions of every man? this would be a form of government which we have heard ſometimes recommended as the moſt perfect, in which all are governed by all; that is, in other words, where there is no government at all. I agree with theſe pretended patriots, that the people in every country have a right to reſiſt manifeſt grievances and oppreſſions, to change their governors, and even their conſtitutions, on great and extraordinary occaſions; whenever they groan under the rod of tyranny, they have a right to ſhake it off, and form a conſtitution more productive of liberty; and, in like manner, if they find themſelves torn by irreconcileable factions, and debilitated by internal contentions, they have an equal right to change it for a government more arbitrary and deciſive. But we ſhall not agree ſo well in our definition of that important and miſapplied term 'the people;' by which I would be underſtood to

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mean the whole body of a nation, adviſed and directed by the moſt reſpectable members of it; who are poſſeſſed of rank, property, wiſdom, and experience: But who are thoſe in this country, whom our modern demagogues diſtinguiſh by this name, and veſt with this ſupreme dominion? Not the hereditary peers of the realm; not the repreſentatives of this very people in parliament aſſembled; not the paſtors of the church, the ſages of the law, or the magiſtrates who are guardians of the public ſafety; not the poſſeſſors of landed property, the opulent ſtockholder, or the wealthy merchant. Theſe are all repreſented as tools of miniſters, lovers of ſlavery, united in a conſpiracy to deſtroy their country and ruin themſelves: they point out to us no defenders of our liberties or properties, but thoſe who have themſelves neither; no public-ſpirit, but in the garrets of Grub-ſtreet; no reformation, but from the purlieus of St. Giles's; nor one Solon, or Lycurgus, but who is to emerge from the tin-mines of Cornwall, or the coal-pits of Newcaſtle. Theſe are not the people whom I ſhould chuſe to truſt with unlimited power, becauſe I know they are totally incapable of employing it to any ſalutary purpoſe, even for themſelves; and, whatever might be our grievances, redreſs from ſuch hands would be much more intolerable.

Fourthly;

Fourthly; That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed. This imaginary compact is repreſented by ſome, as a formal agreement entered into by the two contracting parties, by which the latter gives up part of their natural independence, in exchange for protection granted by the former; without which voluntary ſurrender, no one man, or body of men, could have a right to controul the actions of another; and ſome have gone ſo far as to aſſert, that this ſurrender cannot be made binding by repreſentation, that parents cannot conſent to it for their children, or nations for individuals, but that every one muſt give his perſonal concurrence, and that on this alone the conſtitution of every government is or ought to be founded: but all this is a ridiculous fiction, intended only to ſubvert all government, and let mankind looſe to prey upon each other; for, in fact, no ſuch compact ever was propoſed or agreed to, no ſuch natural independence ever poſſeſſed, and conſequently can never have been given up. We hear a great deal about the conſtitutions of different ſtates, by which are underſtood ſome particular modes of government, ſettled at ſome particular times, which ought to be ſupported with religious veneration through all ſucceeding ages: in ſome of theſe, the people are ſuppoſed to have a right to greater degrees of liberty than in others, having made better bargains for themſelves,

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and given up leſs of their natural independence: but this, and all concluſions drawn from theſe premiſes, muſt be falſe, becauſe the facts on which they are founded are not true; for no ſuch conſtitutions, eſtabliſhed on general conſent, are any where to be found; all which, we ſee, are the offſprings of force or fraud, of accident, and the circumſtances of the times, and muſt perpetually change with thoſe circumſtances: in all of them, the people have an equal right to preſerve or regain their liberty, whenever they are able. But the queſtion is not, what right they have to liberty, but, what degree of it they are capable of enjoying, without accompliſhing their own deſtruction. In ſome countries this is very ſmall, and in none can it be very great, becauſe the depravity of human nature will not permit it. Compact is repugnant to the very nature of government; whoſe eſſence is compulſion, and which originates always from neceſſity, and never from choice or compact; and it is the moſt egregious abſurdity, to reaſon from the ſuppoſed rights of mankind in an imaginary ſtate of nature, a ſtate the moſt unnatural, becauſe in ſuch a ſtate they never did or can ſubſiſt, or were ever deſigned for. The natural ſtate of man is by no means a ſtate of ſolitude and independence, but of ſociety and ſubordination; all the effects of human art are parts of his nature, becauſe the power of producing them is beſtowed upon him by the

the author of it. It is as natural for men to build cities, as for birds to build neſts; and to live under ſome kind of government, as for bees and ants; without which he can no more ſubſiſt than thoſe ſocial and induſtrious inſects; nor has he either more right, or power, than they, to refuſe his ſubmiſſion. But if every man was poſſeſſed of this natural independence, and had a right to ſurrender it on a bargain, he muſt have an equal right to retain it; then he has a right to chuſe, whether he will purchaſe protection at the price of freedom, or whether he prefers liberty and plunder to ſafety and conſtraint: a large majority of mankind, who have neither property nor principles, would undoubtedly make choice of the latter, and all theſe might rob, and murder, and commit all manner of crimes with impunity; for, if this their claim to natural independence is well founded, they could not be juſtly amenable to any tribunal upon earth, and thus the world would ſoon become a ſcene of univerſal rapine and bloodſhed. This ſhews into what abſurdities we run, whenever we reaſon from ſpeculative principles, without attending to practicability and experience: for the real truth is no more than this, every man, by the conſtitution of human nature, comes into the world under ſuch a degree of authority and reſtraint as is neceſſary for the preſervation and happineſs of his ſpecies and himſelf; this is no more left

to his choice, than whether he will come into the world, or not; and this obligation he carries about with him, ſo long as he continues in it. Hence he is bound to ſubmit to the laws and conſtitution of every country in which he reſides, and is juſtly puniſhable for diſobedience to them. To aſk a man whether he chuſes to be ſubject to any law or government, is to aſk him, whether he chuſes to be a man, or a wild beaſt, and wiſhes to be treated accordingly. So far are men from being poſſeſſed of this natural independence, on which ſo many ſyſtems of anarchy have been erected, that ſubmiſſion to authority is eſſential to humanity, and a principal condition on which it is beſtowed: man is evidently made for ſociety, and ſociety cannot ſubſiſt without government, and therefore government is as much a part of human nature, as a hand, a heart, or a head; all theſe are frequently applied to the worſt of purpoſes, and ſo is government; but it would be ridiculous from thence to argue, that we ſhould live longer and happier without them. The Supreme Governor of the world has not determined who ſhall be his vicegerents, nor what forms of government ſhall be adopted; but he has unalterably decreed that there ſhall be ſome; and therefore, though no particular governors can lay claim to a divine right of ruling, yet government itſelf is of divine inſtitution, as much

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as eating, and for the ſame reaſon, becauſe we cannot ſubſiſt without it.

Fifthly; That no government ought to ſubſiſt any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the governed as to the governors. If this propoſition is adopted, and by advantage wealth and power are to be underſtood, there is an end of all government at once; for the greateſt ſhare of theſe muſt be poſſeſſed by the governors; becauſe without it they could not govern: power and property always accompany each other, and power is government; theſe, therefore, muſt reſide with thoſe who govern; and, how often ſoever theſe may change hands, and the condition of individuals be altered, with regard to the community the caſe muſt eternally be the ſame: on this principle, therefore, the governed would have a perpetual right to reſiſt, and every government ought to be diſſolved at the moment of its commencement: on this principle, the loweſt of the people, in every country, may at any time be incited to rebel, and their rebellion be juſtified; for, while they feel themſelves oppreſſed with poverty, and condemned to labour, and behold their ſuperiors enjoying all the pomps and luxuries of life, it will be eaſy to perſuade them, that they receive greater benefits from government than themſelves, and that, for that reaſon, they have a right to ſubvert it: this right they are always ready to aſſert, and will not

ſo eaſily be diſſuaded from the attempt, by being told, what is certainly true, that they really receive as much benefit from government as thoſe who govern; becauſe, by that alone, they are every day prevented from tearing one another to pieces: but this argument will have but little weight, becauſe they will never be convinced, that this is any benefit, and not rather an infringement of their natural rights.

In ſhort, all theſe wild and extravagant principles are the production of ignorance, or ambition, invented and propagated either by thoſe who are unacquainted with human nature, and human government, or thoſe who endeavour to render it impracticable in the hands of others, that it may fall into their own; and all terminate in one abſurd concluſion, which is, That government is an unjuſtifiable impoſition, and violation of the rights of nature, and ought to be eradicated from the face of the earth. But, happily for the world, whenever men preſume to reaſon againſt the courſe of nature, and the decrees of Providence, their arguments, however ingenious, have but little effect; for government there muſt be, ſo long as there are men, and the diſpute will ſtill continue to be, that only of who ſhall govern.

It is an old and a juſt obſervation, that the loudeſt advocates for liberty have always been the greateſt tyrants whenever they have got

got power into their hands; and this muſt neceſſarily be, becauſe a love of liberty is an impatience of controul, and, when this impatience of controul is united with power, reſiſtance is an infringement of their liberty who poſſeſs it, and is treated by them with ſeverity, in proportion to their impatience of controul; and thus the ſame diſpoſition, which in a ſubject conſtitutes a patriot, in a prince creates a tyrant. This ſhews, that an extraordinary zeal for liberty is nothing more than an extraordinary fondneſs for power, that is, a power to controul the actions of others, uncontrouled ourſelves; and this love of liberty does not ariſe ſo much from our fears of being ill-governed as from our diſlike of being governed at all. So true is this, that I am fully perſuaded, that if an angel was ſent from heaven, veſted with irreſiſtible power, to govern any country upon earth, and was to execute his commiſſion with the utmoſt degree of wiſdom, juſtice, and benevolence, his dominions would very ſoon be deſerted by moſt of the inhabitants; who would rather chuſe to ſuffer mutual injuries and oppreſſions, however grievous, under any government in which they themſelves had a ſhare, than to be compelled to be virtuous and happy by any ſuperior authority whatever.

The uſual fallacy of which democratic writers avail themſelves, is this—they conſtantly charge all the numerous evils inherent in all human governments to the ac-

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count of the governors; which for the moſt part are imputable with more propriety to the governed: it is owing to their vices that there is any ſuch thing as government, or any occaſion for it; and conſequently all its attendant evils muſt be derived from the ſame ſource. It is their crimes, which require puniſhment, and their venality which makes corruption neceſſary; war, with all its horrors, ſprings from their depravity, the violence of faction, the avarice of commerce, the ambition of the rich, and the profligacy and idleneſs of the poor: princes are made tyrants by the perverſeneſs and diſobedience of their ſubjects, and ſubjects become ſlaves from their incapacity to enjoy liberty. Every governor is in the ſituation of a gaoler, whoſe very office ariſes from the criminality of thoſe over whom he preſides; theſe ſometimes ſuffer much from the abuſe of his power; but they would ſuffer more from their mutual ill-uſage, if unreſtrained by his ſuperintendant authority. A vicious and corrupt people can never be free, becauſe they are obliged to take ſhelter under deſpotiſm, which alone can defend them from the oppreſſions and injuries which they would every hour inflict upon each other; and a virtuous people will never be ſlaves, becauſe they ſtand in need of no ſuch defence.

We cannot fall into a more common, or more pernicious error, than to imagine, that, becauſe liberty is our ſupreme bleſſing, we, for

for that reaſon, can never have too much: if this was true, government would indeed be a grievance, and ought every where to be aboliſhed; but the bleſſings of liberty, like all others beſtowed upon mankind, are circumſcribed within certain bounds, and become misfortunes by exceſs: dominion is not allotted to the few, for their own, but for the benefit of the many over whom they rule, and no greater degree of power ſhould ever be truſted in the hands of man, than is requiſite for that end; but to ſo much every community muſt ſubmit for its own preſervation; and this is the only ſtandard by which a juſt proportion of liberty can be aſcertained. Every nation is by no means happy in proportion to the degree of freedom which it enjoys, but, as that degree is adapted to the circumſtances and the diſpoſitions of the people; and with them muſt frequently change. The ſame degree of power, which happily governs a ſmall, induſtrious, virtuous, and frugal ſtate, is totally unable to reſtrain the avarice, ambition, and faction of an extenſive, rich, and luxurious empire; as the ſtill and cryſtal lake is quietly bounded by the flowery banks which ſurround it; whilſt the turbulent and tempeſtuous ocean can be confined only by tremendous rocks and aſpiring mountains. The greateſt degree of liberty, which any people can enjoy, is, to be governed by equitable and impartial laws; but theſe cannot

not be adminiſtered, but either by their voluntary ſubmiſſion, or by ſuperior force; if the firſt is refuſed, the latter muſt be exerted, and then liberty ſubſiſts no more: and hence it is evident, that thoſe who will not be contented with the greateſt degree of this invaluable bleſſing, muſt quickly find themſelves deprived of the leaſt; and that every people, who, from falſe and impracticable notions of liberty, refuſe to ſubmit to any government of their own, muſt very ſoon, from the conſtitution of human nature, be obliged to receive it under the yoke of ſome foreign power, which is wiſer, and therefore ſtronger than themſelves.

DISQUISITION VIII.

ON RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS.

THE zealous advocates for religious liberty, frequently attack us with this triumphant queſtion, What has government to do with men's religion? To which I anſwer, Nothing; provided men's religion had nothing to do with government: but our religious and political opinions and intereſts are ſo intimately connected, and ſo blended together, that it is impoſſible to divide them. Were religious

gious controverſies relative to ſpeculative doctrines only, government would have neither right or inclination to interfere in them; but ſuch are by no means the objects of contention: theſe doctrines, believed by few, and underſtood by fewer, are nothing more than the ſignals of parties ſtruggling for ſuperiority, not for truth; for, as in civil conteſts men perſecute each other for wearing ribands of different colours, ſo do they in religions, for profeſſing different opinions; not that they have any objections to the ribands, or the opinions, but becauſe both are the marks by which thoſe are diſtinguiſhed who are adverſe to their purſuits. Proteſtants never inſtitute ſevere penal laws againſt Papiſts becauſe they believe tranſubſtantiation, (for why ſhould they not believe it, if they can?) but, becauſe the profeſſion of that doctrine is the teſt, by which thoſe are known to be members of a church which would infringe their liberties, and devour a great part of their property; on the other hand, the Church of Rome does not proſecute Proteſtants becauſe they cannot aſſent to this doctrine, but, becauſe the diſavowal of it is the ſignal that they are deſirous to pull down that fabric of wealth and power, which they have erected for themſelves, and are unwilling to part with: opinions are held forth as marks of diſtinction, but ambition and intereſt are the real cauſes of the diſpute.

It will perhaps be ſaid, that, notwithſtanding this may be true, there are many, very many pious and honeſt perſons, who, on the ſtricteſt examination, and cleareſt conviction, have adopted opinions on religious ſubjects, of which they are laudably tenacious, and cannot relinquiſh without violating both their reaſon and their conſcience; and that of theſe, for which they are accountable to God alone, no government can have a right to take cognizance, much leſs to controul. To all this I readily agree, ſo long as they continue to be opinions only: but whenever they ſhoot up into actions, which is their natural proceſs, they then come within the line of human juriſdiction, and government is obliged to take notice of them, not from choice, but from neceſſity and ſelf-preſervation: for every religious ſect holds principles more or leſs productive of arbitrary power, liberty, or anarchy, which muſt neceſſarily affect the civil conſtitutions under which they are profeſſed; as they are the moſt dangerous, as well as the moſt common combuſtibles, which knavery employs to ſet folly and ignorance in a flame, whenever it may be ſubſervient to her intereſt. All religious ſects, however they may differ in other points, agree in one, which is the purſuit of power, and this by the ſame progreſſive ſteps—by firſt imploring toleration, next claiming equality, and then ſtruggling for ſuperiority over all the reſt. Govern-

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ment cannot remain an unconcerned ſpectator of theſe contentions, in which her own exiſtence is at ſtake, but muſt ſtretch out a pacific hand to compoſe them: this ſhe can effect by no other method, than by taking one, which ſhe moſt approves, under her protection, maintaining its miniſters, and forming her public worſhip agreeably to its doctrines; that is, in other words, by an eſtabliſhment: and thus we ſee, that ſome religious eſtabliſhment muſt neceſſarily make a part of every national conſtitution; which neceſſity proceeds not from any natural connection between religion and government, but, becauſe the artifice, ignorance, and ſuperſtition of mankind never fails to unite them: and hence, I apprehend, ariſes that alliance between church and ſtate, which has been ſo much diſcuſſed, and ſo little underſtood.

The eſtabliſhment of one religion ought always to be accompanied by an unlimited toleration of all others, on the principles of both juſtice and policy; of juſtice, becauſe, although every government has a right to beſtow her protection and emoluments on any mode of religion which ſhe moſt approves, ſhe can have no right to enforce the belief or exerciſe of that, or to prohibit the profeſſion of any other, by compulſive penalties; of policy, becauſe ſuch a toleration is the moſt effectual means of putting an end to all religious diſſenſions, which ſpringing,

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for the moſt part, from a love of ſingularity and contradiction, thrive under perſecution, and, when they ceaſe to be oppoſed, they ceaſe to exiſt.

If ſome eſtabliſhment is thus neceſſary, ſo muſt be ſome teſts, or ſubſcriptions, by which the friends of this eſtabliſhment may be diſtinguiſhed, and the principles of thoſe who are admitted into it aſcertained; without which it would be no eſtabliſhment at all: but every wiſe government will take care to make theſe as comprehenſive as the nature of their inſtitutions will admit, in order to leſſen the number of her enemies; for moſt aſſuredly ſuch will all be who are excluded. Whoever are enemies to the religious conſtitution of any country, whatever they may pretend, can never be friends to its civil; for it is impoſſible that an honeſt man, who believes his own religious profeſſion to be true, and moſt acceptable to his Creator, ſhould ever be cordially attached to a conſtitution which diſcourages the exerciſe of it, and patronizes another, which appears to him to be falſe and impious. Extend this comprehenſion as widely as poſſible, it will exclude many pious and worthy perſons, who are tenacious of different principles; and narrow it to any degree, it will ſtill admit all thoſe who have none: nor is it inexpedient that they ſhould be admitted; for every ſtate has a right to avail itſelf of their aſſiſtance, who, though they are not ſo good men,

men, may be better ſubjects; as theſe may be induced by intereſt to ſupport the conſtitution of their country, while thoſe are compelled by principle to ſubvert it.

Thoſe who will not conform to any Chriſtian eſtabliſhment, give theſe reaſons for their diſſent;—that the religion ſo eſtabliſhed is imperfect, corrupted, and diſſimilar to the genuine purity of that holy inſtitution; and that they are in duty bound to reject ſuch a religion, and to ſearch for another, which appears to them to be more perfect and pure. The firſt of theſe reaſons is unhappily true, but no apology for their conduct; the latter, entirely a miſtake, and therefore ought not to be regarded.

Firſt then, the charge of imperfection and corruption may be made good againſt any eſtabliſhed religion that ever exiſted. It muſt be liable to many imperfections from its own nature, and the nature of man; in its original inſtitution, it muſt lean to the errors and prejudices of the times; and, how much ſoever it is then approved, it cannot long preſerve that approbation, becauſe, human ſcience being continually fluctuating, mankind grow more or leſs knowing in every generation, and conſequently muſt change their opinions on religious, as well as on all other ſubjects; ſo that, however wiſely any eſtabliſhed ſyſtem may be formed at firſt, it muſt, from the natural increaſe or decreaſe of human knowledge, be found or thought

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to be erroneous in the courſe of a few years: and yet the change of national religions cannot keep pace with the alterations of national opinions, becauſe ſuch frequent reviews and reformations would totally unhinge men's principles, and ſubvert the foundations of all religion and morality whatever. It muſt likewiſe be corrupted by the very eſtabliſhment which protects it, becauſe by that it will be mixed with the worldly purſuits of its degenerate votaries; and it muſt be extremely diſſimilar to its original purity, or it would be incapable of being eſtabliſhed; for pure and genuine Chriſtianity never was, nor ever can be the national religion of any country upon earth. It is a gold too refined to be worked up with any human inſtitution, without a large portion of alloy; for, no ſooner is this ſmall grain of muſtard-ſeed watered with the fertile flowers of civil emoluments, than it grows up into a large and ſpreading tree, under the ſhelter of whoſe branches the birds of prey and plunder will not fail to make for themſelves comfortable habitations, and thence deface its beauty, and deſtroy its fruits.

Theſe imputations on religious eſtabliſhments are certainly juſt, but no reaſons for diſſenſions, becauſe the inference which makes the latter propoſition is entirely a miſtake; for no man can be bound in duty to deſert a national religion, on account of defects congenial to its nature, nor to ſearch for

for perfection, which is no where to be found. Some religious eſtabliſhment is abſolutely neceſſary to the exiſtence of every ſtate; but it is not neceſſary that this ſhould be perfect, and free from all errors and corruption, nor even that it ſhould be ſo eſteemed by thoſe who conform to it: it is ſufficiently perfect for this purpoſe, if it contains nothing repugnant to the principles of ſound morality, and the doctrines of Chriſt. The maſs of the people in every country, being incapable of making any accurate enquiry into religious ſubjects, muſt have a religion ready made, or none at all; and in this, thoſe of ſuperior abilities may conſcientiouſly join, without impeding their further reſearches into the diſpenſations of Providence, and the duties of man. Great and numerous muſt be the inconveniencies of any religious eſtabliſhment in the hands of men; but what would be the condition of any nation in which there was none? No uniform mode of public worſhip could there be adopted; no edifices built or repaired for the celebration of it, nor miniſters maintained to perform it, except at the will of an ignorant and diſcordant multitude, the majority of whom would chuſe rather to have neither worſhip, churches, or miniſters, than to incur the expences which muſt attend them. Every man, who had any ſenſe of religion, would make one for himſelf; from whence innumerable ſects would ſpring up, each of which

which would chuſe a miniſter for themſelves; who, being dependent for ſubſiſtence on the voluntary and precarious liberality of his congregation, muſt indulge their humours, ſubmit to their paſſions, participate of their vices, and learn of them what doctrines they would chuſe to be taught; and conſequently none but the moſt ignorant and illiterate would undertake ſo mean and beggarly an employment. A people thus left to the dominion of their own imaginations and paſſions, and the inſtructions of ſuch teachers, would ſplit into as many ſects and parties, diviſions and ſubdiviſions, as knavery and folly, artifice, abſurdity, and enthuſiaſm, can produce; each of which would be attacked with violence, and ſupported with obſtinacy by all the reſt. This evidently demonſtrates, that ſome religious eſtabliſhment muſt be annexed to every civil government; the members of which are ſo far from being bound in duty to deſert it, becauſe it falls ſhort of their ideas of purity and perfection, that they are obliged by all the ties of benevolence and ſociety to conform to and ſupport it, unleſs it requires any conceſſions poſitively criminal.

Should it ſtill be inſiſted on, that every man is obliged to profeſs and exerciſe that religion which appears to him moſt conſonant to reaſon, and moſt acceptable to God, with which no government can have a right to meddle, or power to controul; in anſwer I ſhall

I ſhall only ſay, that all this is undoubtedly a miſtake, which ariſes from applying propoſitions to men, as members of national communities, which are applicable to them only as individuals. Mankind, ſo long as they reſide on this terreſtrial globe, ought always to be conſidered in a two-fold capacity; as individuals, and as members of ſociety; that is, as men, and as citizens: in which different ſituations, ſo different are their relations and duties, that there is ſcarce a propoſition which we can affirm of them with truth in one, which is not falſe if applied to them in the other. It is by this miſapplication that the zealous advocates for unbounded liberty, civil and religious, deceive their followers, and ſometimes themſelves, and draw concluſions equally deſtructive of all government and religion. Thus, for inſtance, they aſſert that all men are by nature free, equal, and independent: this, when applied to men as a general ſpecies, is true; they then apply this aſſertion to men who are members of civil communities, to whom ſubordination is neceſſary, and obedience to their ſuperiors an indiſpenſable duty, and therefore in regard to whom it is abſolutely falſe; and yet from hence they endeavour to prove, that government is an infringement of the natural rights of mankind. In like manner they affirm, that every man is obliged to make choice of that religion, and to adhere to that mode of worſhip, which appear to

his judgment to be the pureſt, and moſt acceptable to his Creator: this propoſition, likewiſe, with regard to men conſidered as individuals, is true; but this again they apply to members of national communities, and eſtabliſhed churches: with regard to whom it is not true; for, as ſuch, they are bound in duty to profeſs that religion, and practiſe that mode of worſhip, which the laws of that community enjoin, provided they find nothing in them poſitively evil: yet from hence they would perſuade us, that every individual has a right to deſert, or even to oppoſe, the eſtabliſhed religion of his country, whenever he finds, or fancies he can find, a better. Thus are their unwary admirers deceived: the truth of theſe propoſitions they cannot deny, and have not perhaps ſagacity ſufficient to diſcover their miſapplication.

It is remarkable, that Chriſtianity conſtantly addreſſes us as men, never as citizens; the only duty it requires of us under that character, is ſubmiſſion to power in general, but preſcribes no rules for our political conduct: all thoſe divine precepts of patience, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, non-reſiſtance of evil, contempt of the world, and indifference to the things of it, are given us as individuals, but not as members of national communities; becauſe in that character they would have been impracticable: for no ſtate can adminiſter her internal policy, and much

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leſs regulate her conduct with regard to foreign powers, in conformity to theſe commands; becauſe the imperfections, the paſſions, and the vices of mankind will not permit it. Any one as an individual may pay obedience to them; to thoſe who have little to do with the buſy occupations of the world, it is an eaſy and a pleaſing taſk; for thoſe who are deeply and earneſtly engaged in the moſt innocent of them, it is extremely difficult, but for thoſe who are employed in the great concerns of political communities, in carrying on war, negociating peace, and managing the intrigues of contending factions, it is abſolutely impracticable. This I take to be the cauſe of thoſe frequent declarations from the Author of this religion, that neither himſelf nor his doctrines are of this world; but adverſe to all its purſuits: and this perhaps may be the reaſon of that aſſertion, that it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God; becauſe, rich men being uſually moſt engaged in theſe purſuits, moſt attached to the world, and moſt involved in the buſineſs of it, the extreme difficulty of their admiſſion is thus forcibly expreſſed: or, if by a rich man, is here meant a great man, that is, a conqueror, a hero, or a ſtateſman, this declaration may perhaps be literally true; and that it ſhould in this place be ſo underſtood, ſeems no improbable conjecture, as a rich man, and a great

man, in moſt languages are ſynonymous terms. The firſt Chriſtians ſaw their religion in this light, and refuſed to have any concern with government, unleſs to obey it; they inquired not into the rights of thoſe who ruled, nor their own to liberty, and wiſhed for nothing, but to paſs through this life unincumbered with its buſineſs, and well prepared for a better: ſo long as they were a ſmall ſect, diſſenting from the religions of the countries in which they lived, this inoffenſive conduct was eaſily preſerved; but, when princes and nobles adopted their religion, and by ſuch illuſtrious examples it became almoſt univerſal, theſe principles of inactivity were no longer tenable, without the total diſſolution of all government; for, if no man would govern, there could be none: neceſſity therefore obliged them to take a part; a part ſoon awakened ambition, and love of power, thoſe paſſions ſo natural to the human heart, and induced them to ſeize the whole; Chriſtianity was eſtabliſhed, in conſequence corrupted, and little more of it remained, except the name.

To this opinion of the incompatibility of Chriſtianity with the occupations and cuſtoms of the world, were all thoſe numerous monaſtic inſtitutions, which every where accompanied its progreſs, indebted for their origin; inſtitutions certainly favourable to the genuine ſpirit of that religion, but, like the religion itſelf, ſo adverſe to the nature of man,

man, that they can never be made fit for general uſe: could they have been confined to thoſe few, who are capable of employing ſolitude in devotion and religious contemplation, they would undoubtedly have been conducive to the practice of every Chriſtian virtue; but, as all were indiſcriminately admitted, who pretended to ſanctity, or who miſtook enthuſiaſm for piety, and a quarrel with the world for the love of God, they could not fail very ſoon to become nothing better than retreats for lazineſs, and ſeminaries of ſuperſtition and vice: yet, notwithſtanding all their abuſes, I am inclined to think there are ſtill within their walls ſome few inſtances of patience and reſignation, devotion and charity, carried to a higher degree of perfection than they are or can be in any other ſituation, in which the faſhions, the pleaſures, and buſineſs of life, and the corruptions of national eſtabliſhments, muſt more or leſs obſtruct their progreſs; where our virtue muſt be endangered by continual temptations, our meditations diverted from celeſtial objects by wordly purſuits; our devotions interrupted by amuſements and impertinence; and that ſerene cheerfulneſs and happy complacency, ſo eſſential to the Chriſtian profeſſion, muſt frequently be diſturbed by injuries and diſappointments. The voluntary hardſhips which many of theſe recluſes impoſed upon themſelves, were probably derived from a miſtaken notion, that

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ſuffering was an eſſential part of their religion; a notion which they had perhaps contracted from that conſtant connection between them, which they had ſo long obſerved and felt during their perſecutions, and were not able ſuddenly to abandon, in happier and more indulgent times.

But why then eſtabliſh a religion, which is ſo improper for the purpoſe? Becauſe it is leſs improper than any other. The eſtabliſhment of ſome religion is neceſſary to the exiſtence of every ſtate, and it is as neceſſary that this ſhould be, or be thought, a revelation from God. Mere Deiſm never was, or can be, the eſtabliſhed religion of any country; for, as all its principles muſt be derived from the reaſon of ſome, they will be always controverted by the reaſon of others, and can therefore never obtain a general acquieſcence. The philoſopher, by learned inveſtigations, and the force of his own underſtanding, may be convinced of the great truths of natural religion; but, without the ſanction of ſupernatural authority, he will never be able to convince others, who will neither believe his doctrines, or obey his precepts. If Chriſtianity, therefore, is not adopted, ſome fabulous ſyſtem muſt ſupply its place; and, if ſome eſtabliſhed religion there muſt be, it is ſurely more eligible to make a true than a fictitious revelation the baſis of it. Nor will any one, I ſuppoſe, aſſert, that it would be preferable

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to eſtabliſh Paganiſm or Mahometiſm, and lay Chriſtianity by for private uſe; which, disfigured as it is by worldly connections, is ſtill ſuperior to all other inſtitutions. As members therefore of political communities, we are bound to accept it with all its imperfections; though, as individuals, we ought always to approach as near to its original purity, as our own imperfections will permit.

A

VIEW

OF THE

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

Almoſt thou perſuadeſt me to be a Chriſtian.
Acts xxvi. 28.

MOST of the writers, who have undertaken to prove the divine origin of the Chriſtian Religion, have had recourſe to arguments drawn from theſe three heads: the prophecies ſtill extant in the Old Teſtament —the miracles recorded in the New—or, the internal evidence ariſing from that excellence, and thoſe clear marks of ſupernatural interpoſition, which are ſo conſpicuous in the religion itſelf. The two former have been ſufficiently explained and enforced by the ableſt pens; but the laſt, which ſeems to carry with it the greateſt degree of conviction, has never, I think, been conſidered with that attention, which it deſerves.

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I mean not here to depreciate the proofs arising from either prophecies, or miracles: they both have, or ought to have, their proper weight; prophecies are permanent miracles, whose authority is sufficiently confirmed by their completion, and are therefore solid proofs of the supernatural origin of a religion, whose truth they were intended to testify; such are those to be found in various parts of the scriptures relative to the coming of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the unexampled state in which the Jews have ever since continued, all so circumstantially descriptive of the events, that they seem rather histories of past, than predictions of future transactions; and whoever will seriously consider the immense distance of time between some of them and the events which they foretell, the uninterrupted chain by which they are connected for many thousand years, how exactly they correspond with those events, and how totally unapplicable they are to all others in the history of mankind; I say, whoever considers these circumstances, he will scarcely be persuaded to believe that they can be the productions of preceding artifice, or posterior application, or can entertain the least doubt of their being derived from supernatural inspiration.

The miracles recorded in the New Testament to have been performed by Christ and his Apostles, were certainly convincing proofs

proofs of their divine commiſſion to thoſe who ſaw them; and as they were ſeen by ſuch numbers, and are as well atteſted, as other hiſtorical facts, and above all, as they were wrought on ſo great and ſo wonderful an occaſion, they muſt ſtill be admitted as evidence of no inconſiderable force; but, I think, they muſt now depend for much of their credibility on the truth of that religion, whoſe credibility they were at firſt intended to ſupport. To prove therefore the truth of the Chriſtian Religion, we ſhould begin by ſhewing the internal marks of divinity, which are ſtamped upon it; becauſe on this the credibility of the prophecies and miracles in a great meaſure depends; for if we have once reaſon to be convinced, that this religion is derived from a ſupernatural origin, prophecies and miracles will become ſo far from being incredible, that it will be highly probable, that a ſupernatural revelation ſhould be foretold, and enforced by ſupernatural means.

What pure Chriſtianity is, diveſted of all its ornaments, appendages, and corruption, I pretend not to ſay; but what it is not, I will venture to affirm, which is, that it is not the offſpring of fraud or fiction: ſuch, on a ſuperficial view, I know it muſt appear to every man of good ſenſe, whoſe ſenſe has been altogether employed on other ſubjects; but if any one will give himſelf the trouble to examine it with accuracy and candor, he will

will plainly ſee, that however fraud and fiction may have grown up with it, yet it never could have been grafted on the ſame ſtock, nor planted by the ſame hand.

To aſcertain the true ſyſtem, and genuine doctrines of this religion, after the undecided controverſies of above ſeventeen centuries, and to remove all the rubbiſh, which artifice and ignorance have been heaping upon it during all that time, would indeed be an arduous taſk, which I ſhall by no means undertake; but to ſhew, that it cannot poſſibly be derived from human wiſdom, or human impoſture, is a work, I think, attended with no great difficulty, and requiring no extraordinary abilities, and therefore I ſhall attempt that, and that alone, by ſtating, and then explaining the following plain and undeniable propoſitions.

Firſt, That there is now extant a book intitled the New Teſtament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a ſyſtem of religion intirely new, both with regard to the object and the doctrines, not only infinitely ſuperior to, but unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewiſe be collected a ſyſtem of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reaſon is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wiſeſt philoſophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on falſe principles is totally omitted,

omitted, and many new precepts added peculiarly correſponding with the new object of this religion.

Laſtly, That ſuch a ſyſtem of religion and morality could not poſſibly have been the work of any man, or ſet of men; much leſs of thoſe obſcure, ignorant, and illiterate perſons, who actually did diſcover, and publiſh it to the world: and that therefore it muſt undoubtedly have been effected by the interpoſition of divine power, that is, that it muſt derive its origin from God.

PROPOSITION I.

VERY little need be ſaid to eſtabliſh my firſt propoſition, which is ſingly this: That there is now extant a book intitled the New Teſtament; that is, there is a collection of writings diſtinguiſhed by that denomination, containing four hiſtorical accounts of the birth, life, actions, diſcourſes, and death of an extraordinary perſon named Jeſus Chriſt, who was born in the reign of Auguſtus Cæſar, preached a new religion throughout the country of Judea, and was put to a cruel and ignominious death in the reign of Tiberius. Alſo one other hiſtorical account of the travels, tranſactions, and orations of ſome mean and illiterate men, known by the title of his Apoſtles, whom he commiſſioned to propagate

gate his religion after his death; which he foretold them he muſt ſuffer in confirmation of its truth. To theſe are added ſeveral epiſtolary writings, addreſſed by theſe perſons to their fellow-labourers in this work, or to the ſeveral churches or ſocieties of Chriſtians, which they had eſtabliſhed in the ſeveral cities through which they had paſſed.

It would not be difficult to prove, that theſe books were written ſoon after thoſe extraordinary events, which are the ſubjects of them; as we find them quoted, and referred to by an uninterrupted ſucceſſion of writers from thoſe to the preſent times: nor would it be leſs eaſy to ſhew, that the truth of all thoſe events, miracles only excepted, can no more be reaſonably queſtioned, than the truth of any other facts recorded in any hiſtory whatever: as there can be no more reaſon to doubt, that there exiſted ſuch a perſon as Jeſus Chriſt, ſpeaking, acting, and ſuffering in ſuch a manner as is there deſcribed, than that there were ſuch men as Tiberius, Herod, or Pontius Pilate, his cotemporaries; or to ſuſpect, that Peter, Paul, and James were not the authors of thoſe epiſtles, to which their names are affixed, than that Cicero and Pliny did not write thoſe which are aſcribed to them. It might alſo be made appear, that theſe books having been wrote by various perſons, at different times, and in diſtant places, could not poſſibly have been the work of a ſingle impoſtor, nor of a fraudulent combination, being

ing all ſtamped with the ſame marks of an uniform originality in their very frame and compoſition.

But all theſe circumſtances I ſhall paſs over unobſerved, as they do not fall in with the courſe of my argument, nor are neceſſary for the ſupport of it. Whether theſe books were wrote by the authors whoſe names are prefixed to them, whether they have been enlarged, diminiſhed, or any way corrupted by the artifice or ignorance of tranſlators or tranſcribers; whether in the hiſtorical parts the writers were inſtructed by a perpetual, a partial, or by any inſpiration at all; whether in the religious and moral parts, they received their doctrines from a divine influence, or from the inſtructions and converſation of their maſter; whether in their facts or ſentiments there is always the moſt exact agreement, or whether in both they ſometimes differ from each other; whether they are in any caſe miſtaken, or always infallible; or even pretended to be ſo, I ſhall not here diſpute: let the Deiſt avail himſelf of all theſe doubts and difficulties, and decide them in conformity to his own opinions, I ſhall not contend, becauſe they affect not my argument: all that I aſſert is a plain fact, which cannot be denied, that ſuch writings do now exiſt.

PROPOSITION II.

MY ſecond propoſition is not quite ſo ſimple, but, I think, not leſs undeniable than the former, and is this: That from this book may be extracted a ſyſtem of religion entirely new, both with regard to the object, and the doctrines, not only infinitely ſuperior to, but totally unlike every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man: I ſay extracted, becauſe all the doctrines of this religion having been delivered at various times, and on various occaſions, and here only hiſtorically recorded, no uniform or regular ſyſtem of theology is here to be found; and better perhaps it had been, if leſs labour had been employed by the learned, to bend and twiſt theſe divine materials into the poliſhed forms of human ſyſtems, to which they never will ſubmit, and for which they were never intended by their great author. Why he choſe not to leave any ſuch behind him we know not, but it might poſſibly be, becauſe he knew, that the imperfection of man was incapable of receiving ſuch a ſyſtem, and that we are more properly and more ſafely conducted by the diſtant and ſcattered rays, than by the too powerful ſunſhine of divine illumination: "If I have told you earthly things," ſays he, "and ye believe not, how ſhall ye believe

"if

" if I tell you of heavenly things*?" that is, If my inſtructions concerning your behaviour in the preſent, as relative to a future life, are ſo difficult to be underſtood, that you can ſcarcely believe me, how ſhall you believe, if I endeavour to explain to you the nature of celeſtial beings, the deſigns of Providence, and the myſteries of his diſpenſations; ſubjects which you have neither ideas to comprehend, nor language to expreſs?

Firſt then, the object of this religion is entirely new, and is this; to prepare us by a ſtate of probation for the kingdom of heaven. This is every where profeſſed by Chriſt and his apoſtles to be the chief end of the Chriſtian's life; the crown for which he is to contend, the goal to which he is to run, the harveſt which is to pay him for all his labours: Yet previous to their preaching no ſuch prize was ever hung out to mankind, nor any means preſcribed for the attainment of it.

It is indeed true, that ſome of the philoſophers of antiquity entertained notions of a future ſtate, but mixed with much doubt and uncertainty: their legiſlators alſo endeavoured to infuſe into the minds of the people a belief of rewards and puniſhments after death; but by this they only intended to give a ſanction to their laws, and to enforce the practice of virtue for the benefit of man-

* John iii. 12.

kind in the preſent life: this alone ſeems to have been their end, and a meritorious end it was: but Chriſtianity not only operates more effectually to this end, but has a nobler deſign in view, which is, by a proper education here to render us fit members of a celeſtial ſociety hereafter. In all former religions the good of the preſent life was the firſt object; in the Chriſtian it is but the ſecond; in thoſe, men were incited to promote that good by the hopes of a future reward; in this, the practice of virtue is injoined in order to qualify them for that reward. There is great difference, I apprehend, in theſe two plans, that is, in adhering to virtue from its preſent utility in expectation of future happineſs, and living in ſuch a manner as to qualify us for the acceptance and enjoyment of that happineſs; and the conduct and diſpoſitions of thoſe, who act on theſe different principles, muſt be no leſs different: on the firſt, the conſtant practice of juſtice, temperance, and ſobriety, will be ſufficient; but on the latter, we muſt add to theſe an habitual piety, faith, reſignation, and contempt of the world: the firſt may make us very good citizens, but will never produce a tolerable Chriſtian. Hence it is that Chriſtianity inſiſts more ſtrongly, than any preceding inſtitution religious or moral, on purity of heart and a benevolent diſpoſition; becauſe theſe are abſolutely neceſſary to its great end; but in thoſe whoſe recommendations

tions of virtue regard the preſent life only, and whoſe promiſed rewards in another were low and ſenſual, no preparatory qualifications were requiſite to enable men to practiſe the one, or to enjoy the other: and therefore we ſee this object is peculiar to this religion; and with it was entirely new.

But although this object, and the principle on which it is founded were new, and perhaps undiſcoverable by reaſon, yet when diſcovered they are ſo conſonant to it, that we cannot but readily aſſent to them. For the truth of this principle, that the preſent life is a ſtate of probation, and education to prepare us for another, is confirmed by every thing which we ſee around us: it is the only key which can open to us the deſigns of Providence in the œconomy of human affairs, the only clue which can guide us through that pathleſs wilderneſs, and the only plan on which this world could poſſibly have been formed, or on which the hiſtory of it can be comprehended or explained. It could never have been formed on a plan of happineſs: becauſe it is every where overſpread with innumerable miſeries; nor of miſery, becauſe it is interſperſed with many enjoyments: it could not have been conſtituted for a ſcene of wiſdom and virtue, becauſe the hiſtory of mankind is little more than a detail of their follies and wickedneſs: nor of vice, becauſe that is no plan at all, being deſtructive of all exiſtence, and conſequently

ſquently of its own. But on this ſyſtem all that we here meet with may be eaſily accounted for; for this mixture of happineſs and miſery, of virtue and vice, neceſſarily reſults from a ſtate of probation and education; as probation implies trials, ſufferings, and a capacity of offending, and education a propriety of chaſtiſement for thoſe offences.

In the next place, the doctrines of this religion are equally new with the object; and contain ideas of God and of man, of the preſent and of a future life; and of the relations which all theſe bear to each other, totally unheard of, and quite diſſimilar from any which had ever been thought on, previous to its publication. No other ever drew ſo juſt a portrait of the worthleſſneſs of this world, and all its purſuits, nor exhibited ſuch diſtinct, lively, and exquiſite pictures of the joys of another; of the reſurrection of the dead, the laſt judgment, and the triumphs of the righteous in that tremendous day, "when this corruptible ſhall put on incor-"ruption, and this mortal ſhall put on im-"mortality*." No other has ever repreſented the Supreme Being in the character of three perſons united in one God†.

* 1 Cor. xv. 53.

† That there ſubſiſts ſome ſuch union in the divine nature, the whole tenour of the New Teſtament ſeems to expreſs, and it was ſo underſtood in the earlieſt ages: but whether this union does, or does not imply equality, or whether it ſubſiſts in general, or only in particular circumſtances, we are not informed, and therefore on theſe queſtions it is not only unneceſſary, but improper for us to decide.

No

No other has attempted to reconcile thoſe ſeeming contradictory but both true propoſitions, the contingency of future events, and the foreknowledge of God, or the free will of the creature with the over-ruling grace of the Creator: no other has ſo fully declared the neceſſity of wickedneſs and puniſhment, yet ſo effectually inſtructed individuals, to reſiſt the one, and to eſcape the other: no other has ever pretended to give any account of the depravity of man, or to point out any remedy for it: no other has ventured to declare the unpardonable nature of ſin without the influence of a mediatorial interpoſition, and a vicarious atonement from the ſufferings of a ſuperior being*. Whether theſe wonderful doctrines are worthy of our belief muſt depend on the opinion, which we entertain of the authority of thoſe, who publiſhed them to the world; but certain it is, that they are all ſo far removed from every tract of the human imagination, that it ſeems equally impoſſible, that they ſhould ever have been derived from the knowledge or the artifice of man.

* That Chriſt ſuffered and died as an atonement for the ſins of mankind, is a doctrine ſo conſtantly and ſo ſtrongly enforced through every part of the New Teſtament, that whoever will ſeriouſly peruſe thoſe writings, and deny that it is there, may, with as much reaſon and truth, after reading the works of Thucydides and Livy, aſſert, that in them no mention is made of any facts relative to the hiſtories of Greece and Rome.

Some

Some indeed there are, who, by perverting the eſtabliſhed ſignification of words, (which they call explaining) have ventured to expunge all theſe doctrines out of the ſcriptures, for no other reaſon than that they are not able to comprehend them; and argue thus:—The ſcriptures are the word of God; in his word no propoſitions contradictory to reaſon can have a place; theſe propoſitions are contradictory to reaſon, and therefore they are not there. But if theſe bold aſſertors would claim any regard, they ſhould reviſe their argument, and ſay—Theſe doctrines make a part, and a material part of the ſcriptures, they are contradictory to reaſon; no propoſitions contradictory to reaſon can be a part of the word of God, and therefore neither the ſcriptures, nor the pretended revelation contained in them, can be derived from him: This would be an argument worthy of rational and candid Deiſts, and demand a reſpectful attention; but when men pretend to diſprove facts by reaſoning, they have no right to expect an anſwer.

And here I cannot omit obſerving, that the perſonal character of the author of this religion is no leſs new, and extraordinary, than the religion itſelf, who "ſpake as never "man ſpake*," and lived as never man lived: in proof of this, I do not mean to al-

* John vii. 46.

ledge,

ledge, that he was born of a virgin, that he faſted forty days, that he performed a variety of miracles, and after being buried three days, that he aroſe from the dead; becauſe theſe accounts will have but little effect on the minds of unbelievers, who, if they believe not the religion, will give no credit to the relation of theſe facts; but I will prove it from facts which cannot be diſputed; for inſtance, he is the only founder of a religion in the hiſtory of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and therefore totally unconducive to any worldly purpoſe whatever: all others, Mahomet, Numa, and even Moſes himſelf, blended their religious inſtitutions with their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their reſpective people; but Chriſt neither aimed at, nor would accept of, any ſuch power; he rejected every object, which all other men purſue, and made choice of all thoſe which others fly from, and are afraid of: he refuſed power, riches, honours, and pleaſure, and courted poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have been the enthuſiaſts and impoſtors, who have endeavoured to impoſe on the world pretended revelations, and ſome of them from pride, obſtinacy, or principle, have gone ſo far, as to lay down their lives, rather than retract; but I defy hiſtory to ſhew one, who ever made his own ſufferings and death a neceſſary part of his original plan, and eſſential to

his

his miſſion; this Chriſt actually did, he foreſaw, foretold, declared, their neceſſity, and voluntarily endured them. If we ſeriouſly contemplate the divine leſſons, the perfect precepts, the beautiful diſcourſes, and the conſiſtent conduct of this wonderful perſon, we cannot poſſibly imagine, that he could have been either an idiot or a madman; and yet, if he was not what he pretended to be, he can be conſidered in no other light; and even under this character he would deſerve ſome attention, becauſe of ſo ſublime and rational an inſanity there is no other inſtance in the hiſtory of mankind.

If any one can doubt of the ſuperior excellence of this religion above all which preceded it, let him but peruſe with attention thoſe unparalleled writings in which it is tranſmitted to the preſent times, and compare them with the moſt celebrated productions of the Pagan world; and if he is not ſenſible of their ſuperior beauty, ſimplicity, and originality, I will venture to pronounce, that he is as deficient in taſte as in faith, and that he is as bad a critic as a Chriſtian: for in what ſchool of ancient philoſophy can he find a leſſon of morality ſo perfect as Chriſt's ſermon on the mount? From which of them can he collect an addreſs to the Deity ſo conciſe, and yet ſo comprehenſive, ſo expreſſive of all that we want, and all that we could deprecate, as that ſhort prayer, which he formed for, and recommended to, his diſciples?

ples? From the works of what ſage of antiquity can he produce ſo pathetic a recommendation of benevolence to the diſtreſſed, and enforced by ſuch aſſurances of a reward, as in thoſe words of Chriſt? "Come, ye "bleſſed of my Father! inherit the kingdom "prepared for you from the foundation of "the world: for I was an hungred, and ye "gave me meat; I was thirſty, and ye gave "me drink; I was a ſtranger, and ye took "me in; I was naked, and ye clothed me; "I was ſick, and ye viſited me; I was in "priſon, and ye came unto me. Then ſhall "the righteous anſwer him, ſaying—Lord, "when ſaw we thee an hungred, and fed "thee, or thirſty, and gave thee drink? when "ſaw we thee a ſtranger, and took thee in, "or naked, and clothed thee? or when ſaw "we thee ſick and in priſon, and came unto "thee? Then ſhall I anſwer and ſay unto "them,—Verily, I ſay unto you, inaſmuch "as you have done it to the leaſt of theſe "my brethren, ye have done it unto me*." Where is there ſo juſt, and ſo elegant a reproof of eagerneſs and anxiety in worldly purſuits, cloſed with ſo forcible an exhortation to confidence in the goodneſs of our Creator, as in theſe words?—"Behold the fowls "of the air; for they ſow not, neither do "they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your "heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not

* Matt. xxv. 34.

"much

" much better than they? Conſider the lilies " of the field, how they grow; they toil not, " neither do they ſpin; and yet I ſay unto " you, that even Solomon in all his glory " was not arrayed like one of theſe: where- " fore, if God ſo clothe the graſs of the field, " which to-day is, and to-morrow is caſt into " the oven, ſhall he not much more clothe " you? O ye of little faith *!" By which of their moſt celebrated poets are the joys re- ſerved for the righteous in a future ſtate, ſo ſublimely deſcribed, as by this ſhort decla- ration, that they are ſuperior to all deſcrip- tion? " Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, " neither have entered into the heart of man, " the things, which God hath prepared for " them that love him †." Where amidſt the dark clouds of Pagan philoſophy can he ſhew us ſuch a clear proſpect of a future ſtate, the immortality of the ſoul, the reſurrection of the dead, and the general judgment, as in St. Paul's firſt epiſtle to the Corinthians? Or from whence can he produce ſuch cogent exhortations to the practice of every virtue, ſuch ardent incitements to piety and devo- tion, and ſuch aſſiſtances to attain them, as thoſe which are to be met with throughout every page of theſe inimitable writings? To quote all the paſſages in them relative to theſe ſubjects, would be almoſt to tranſcribe the whole; it is ſufficient to obſerve, that

* Matt. vi. 26, 28. † 1 Cor. ii. 9.

they

they are every where ſtamped with ſuch apparent marks of ſupernatural aſſiſtance, as render them indiſputably ſuperior to, and totally unlike, all human compoſitions whatever; and this ſuperiority and diſſimilarity is ſtill more ſtrongly marked by one remarkable circumſtance peculiar to themſelves, which is, that whilſt the moral parts, being of the moſt general uſe, are intelligible to the meaneſt capacities, the learned and inquiſitive throughout all ages, perpetually find in them inexhauſtible diſcoveries, concerning the nature, attributes, and diſpenſations of Providence.

To ſay the truth, before the appearance of Chriſtianity there exiſted nothing like religion on the face of the earth; the Jewiſh only excepted: all other nations were immerſed in the groſſeſt idolatry, which had little or no connection with morality, except to corrupt it by the infamous examples of their imaginary deities: they all worſhipped a multiplicity of gods and dæmons, whoſe favour they courted by impious, obſcene, and ridiculous ceremonies, and whoſe anger they endeavoured to appeaſe by the moſt abominable cruelties. In the politeſt ages of the politeſt nations in the world, at a time when Greece and Rome had carried the arts of oratory, poetry, hiſtory, architecture, and ſculpture to the higheſt perfection, and made no inconſiderable advances in thoſe of mathematics, natural, and even moral philoſophy, in religious

religious knowledge they had made none at all; a ſtrong preſumption, that the nobleſt efforts of the mind of man, unaſſiſted by revelation, were unequal to the taſk. Some few indeed of their philoſophers were wiſe enough to reject theſe general abſurdities, and dared to attempt a loftier flight: Plato introduced many ſublime ideas of nature, and its firſt cauſe, and of the immortality of the ſoul, which being above his own and all human diſcovery, he probably acquired from the books of Moſes or the converſation of ſome Jewiſh rabbies, which he might have met with in Egypt, where he reſided, and ſtudied for ſeveral years: from him Ariſtotle, and from both Cicero and ſome few others drew moſt amazing ſtores of philoſophical ſcience, and carried their reſearches into divine truths as far as human genius alone could penetrate. But theſe were bright conſtellations, which appeared ſingly in ſeveral centuries, and even theſe with all this knowledge were very deficient in true theology. From the viſible works of the creation they traced the being and principal attributes of the Creator; but the relation which his being and attributes bear to man they little underſtood; of piety and devotion they had ſcarce any ſenſe, nor could they form any mode of worſhip worthy of the purity and perfection of the divine nature: they occaſionally flung out many elegant encomiums on the native beauty, and excellence of virtue:

tue: but they founded it not on the commands of God, nor connected it with a holy life, nor hung out the happineſs of heaven as its reward, or its object. They ſometimes talked of virtue carrying men to heaven, and placing them amongſt the gods; but by this virtue they meant only the invention of arts, or feats of arms: for with them heaven was open only to legiſlators, and conquerors, the civilizers, or deſtroyers of mankind. This was then the ſummit of religion in the moſt poliſhed nations in the world, and even this was confined to a few philoſophers, prodigies of genius and literature, who were little attended to, and leſs underſtood by the generality of mankind in their own countries; whilſt all the reſt were involved in one common cloud of ignorance and ſuperſtition.

At this time Chriſtianity broke forth from the eaſt like a riſing ſun, and diſpelled this univerſal darkneſs, which obſcured every part of the globe, and even at this day prevails in all thoſe remoter regions, to which its ſalutary influence has not as yet extended. From all thoſe which it has reached, it has, notwithſtanding its corruptions, baniſhed all thoſe enormities, and introduced a more rational devotion, and purer morals: it has taught men the unity, and attributes of the Supreme Being, the remiſſion of ſins, the reſurrection of the dead, life everlaſting, and the kingdom of heaven; doctrines as inconceivable to the wiſeſt of mankind, antecedent

to

to its appearance, as the Newtonian ſyſtem is at this day to the moſt ignorant tribes of ſavages in the wilds of America; doctrines, which human reaſon never could have diſcovered, but which, when diſcovered, coincide with, and are confirmed by it; and which, though beyond the reach of all the learning and penetration of Plato, Ariſtotle, and Cicero, are now clearly laid open to the eye of every peaſant and mechanic with the bible in his hand. Theſe are all plain facts too glaring to be contradicted, and therefore, whatever we may think of the authority of theſe books, the relations which they contain, or the inſpiration of their authors, of theſe facts no man, who has eyes to read, or ears to hear, can entertain a doubt; becauſe there are the books, and in them is this religion.

PROPOSITION III.

MY third propoſition is this, That from this book, called the New Teſtament, may be collected a ſyſtem of ethics, in which every moral precept founded on reaſon is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the antient philoſophers of preceding ages; every moral precept

precept founded on falſe principles is entirely omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly correſponding with the new object of this religion.

By moral precepts founded on reaſon, I mean all thoſe which enforce the practice of ſuch duties as reaſon informs us muſt improve our natures, and conduce to the happineſs of mankind: ſuch are piety to God, benevolence to men, juſtice, charity, temperance, and ſobriety, with all thoſe which prohibit the commiſſion of the contrary vices, all which debaſe our natures, and, by mutual injuries, introduce univerſal diſorder, and conſequently univerſal miſery. By precepts founded on falſe principles, I mean thoſe which recommend fictitious virtues productive of none of theſe ſalutary effects, and therefore, however celebrated and admired, are in fact no virtues at all; ſuch are valour, patriotiſm, and friendſhip.

That virtues of the firſt kind are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection by the Chriſtian religion than by any other, it is here unneceſſary to prove, becauſe this is a truth which has been frequently demonſtrated by her friends, and never once denied by the moſt determined of her adverſaries; but it will be proper to ſhew, that thoſe of the latter ſort are moſt judiciouſly omitted; becauſe they have really no intrinſic merit in them, and are totally incompatible with the genius and ſpirit of this inſtitution.

Valour,

Valour, for inſtance, or active courage, is for the moſt part conſtitutional, and therefore can have no more claim to moral merit, than wit, beauty, health, ſtrength, or any other endowment of the mind or body; and ſo far is it from producing any ſalutary effects by introducing peace, order, or happineſs into ſociety, that it is the uſual perpetrator of all the violences, which from retaliated injuries diſtract the world with bloodſhed and devaſtation. It is the engine by which the ſtrong are enabled to plunder the weak, the proud to trample upon the humble, and the guilty to oppreſs the innocent; it is the chief inſtrument which Ambition employs in her unjuſt purſuits of wealth and power, and is therefore ſo much extolled by her votaries: it was indeed congenial with the religion of Pagans, whoſe gods were for the moſt part made out of deceaſed heroes, exalted to heaven as a reward for the miſchiefs which they had perpetrated upon earth, and therefore with them this was the firſt of virtues, and had even engroſſed that denomination to itſelf; but whatever merit it may have aſſumed among Pagans, with Chriſtians it can pretend to none, and few or none are the occaſions in which they are permitted to exert it: they are ſo far from being allowed to inflict evil, that they are forbid even to reſiſt it: they are ſo far from being encouraged to revenge injuries, that one of their firſt duties is to forgive them;

ſo

ſo far from being incited to deſtroy their enemies, that they are commanded to love them, and to ſerve them to the utmoſt of their power. If Chriſtian nations therefore were nations of Chriſtians, all war would be impoſſible and unknown amongſt them, and valour could be neither of uſe nor eſtimation, and therefore could never have a place in the catalogue of Chriſtian virtues, being irreconcileable with all its precepts. I object not to the praiſe and honours beſtowed on the valiant, they are the leaſt tribute which can be paid them by thoſe who enjoy ſafety and affluence by the intervention of their dangers and ſufferings: I aſſert only that active courage can never be a Chriſtian virtue, becauſe a Chriſtian can have nothing to do with it. Paſſive courage is indeed frequently, and properly inculcated by this meek and ſuffering religion, under the titles of patience and reſignation: a real and ſubſtantial virtue this, and a direct contraſt to the former; for paſſive courage ariſes from the nobleſt diſpoſitions of the human mind, from a contempt of misfortunes, pain, and death, and a confidence in the protection of the Almighty; active, from the meaneſt; from paſſion, vanity, and ſelf-dependence: paſſive courage is derived from a zeal for truth, and a perſeverance in duty; active, is the offspring of pride and revenge, and the parent of cruelty and injuſtice: in ſhort, paſſive courage is the reſolution of a philo-

ſopher; active, the ferocity of a ſavage. Nor is this more incompatible with the precepts, than with the object of this religion, which is the attainment of the kingdom of heaven; for valour is not that ſort of violence, by which that kingdom is to be taken; nor are the turbulent ſpirits of heroes and conquerors admiſſible into thoſe regions of peace, ſubordination, and tranquillity.

Patriotiſm alſo, that celebrated virtue ſo much practiſed in antient, and ſo much profeſſed in modern times, that virtue, which ſo long preſerved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world: this celebrated virtue, I ſay, muſt alſo be excluded; becauſe it not only falls ſhort of, but directly counteracts, the extenſive benevolence of this religion. A Chriſtian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world; and his neighbours and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remoteſt regions, whenever their diſtreſſes demand his friendly aſſiſtance: Chriſtianity commands us to love all mankind, patriotiſm to oppreſs all other countries to advance the imaginary proſperity of our own: Chriſtianity enjoins us to imitate the univerſal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his bleſſings on every nation upon earth; patriotiſm, to copy the mean partiality of an Engliſh pariſh officer, who thinks injuſtice and cruelty meritorious, whenever they promote the intereſts of his own inconſiderable village. This has ever

ever been a favourite virtue with mankind, becauſe it conceals ſelf-intereſt under the maſk of public ſpirit, not only from others, but even from themſelves, and gives a licence to inflict wrongs and injuries not only with impunity, but with applauſe; but it is ſo diametrically oppoſite to the great characteriſtic of this inſtitution, that it never could have been admitted into the liſt of Chriſtian virtues.

Friendſhip likewiſe, although more congenial to the principles of Chriſtianity, ariſing from more tender and amiable diſpoſitions, could never gain admittance amongſt her benevolent precepts, for the ſame reaſon; becauſe it is too narrow and confined, and appropriates that benevolence to a ſingle object, which is here commanded to be extended over all. Where friendſhips ariſe from ſimilarity of ſentiments, and diſintereſted affections, they are advantageous, agreeable, and innocent, but have little pretenſions to merit; for it is juſtly obſerved, "If ye love them, which love you, what "thanks have ye? for ſinners alſo love thoſe "that love them *." But if they are formed from alliances in parties, factions, and intereſts, or from a participation of vices, the uſual parents of what are called friendſhips among mankind, they are then both miſchievous and criminal, and conſequently for-

* Luke vi. 32.

bidden; but in their utmoſt purity deſerve no recommendation from this religion.

To the judicious omiſſion of theſe falſe virtues we may add that remarkable ſilence, which the Chriſtian legiſlator every where preſerves on ſubjects eſteemed by all others of the higheſt importance, civil government, national policy, and the rights of war and peace; of theſe he has not taken the leaſt notice, probably for this plain reaſon, becauſe it would have been impoſſible to have formed any explicit regulations concerning them, which muſt not have been inconſiſtent with the purity of his religion, or with the practical obſervance of ſuch imperfect creatures as men ruling over, and contending with each other: for inſtance, had he abſolutely forbid all reſiſtance to the reigning powers, he had conſtituted a plan of deſpotiſm, and made men ſlaves; had he allowed it, he muſt have authoriſed diſobedience, and made them rebels; had he in direct terms prohibited all war, he muſt have left his followers for ever an eaſy prey to every infidel invader; had he permitted it, he muſt have licenſed all that rapine and murder, with which it is unavoidably attended.

Let us now examine what are thoſe new precepts in this religion peculiarly correſponding with the new object of it, that is, preparing us for the kingdom of heaven: of theſe the chief are poorneſs of ſpirit, forgiveneſs of injuries, and charity to all men; to

to theſe we may add repentance, faith, ſelf-abaſement, and a detachment from the world, all moral duties peculiar to this religion, and abſolutely neceſſary to the attainment of its end.

" Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit; for theirs " is the kingdom of heaven*: by which poorneſs of ſpirit is to be underſtood a diſpoſition of mind, meek, humble, ſubmiſſive to power, void of ambition, patient of injuries, and free from all reſentment. This was ſo new, and ſo oppoſite to the ideas of all Pagan moraliſts, that they thought this temper of mind a criminal and contemptible meanneſs, which muſt induce men to ſacrifice the glory of their country, and their own honour, to a ſhameful puſillanimity; and ſuch it appears to almoſt all who are called Chriſtians even at this day, who not only reject it in practice, but diſavow it in principle, notwithſtanding this explicit declaration of their maſter. We ſee them revenging the ſmalleſt affronts by premeditated murder, as individuals, on principles of honour; and, in their national capacities, deſtroying each other with fire and ſword, for the low conſiderations of commercial intereſts, the balance of rival powers, or the ambition of princes: we ſee them with their laſt breath animating each other to a ſavage revenge, and, in the agonies of death, plunging with

* Matt. v. 3.

ſeeble

feeble arms their daggers into the hearts of their opponents: and, what is ſtill worſe, we hear all theſe barbariſms celebrated by hiſtorians, flattered by poets, applauded in theatres, approved in ſenates, and even ſanctified in pulpits. But univerſal practice cannot alter the nature of truth: pride was not made for man; but humility, meekneſs, and reſignation, that is, poorneſs of ſpirit, was made for man; and properly belongs to his dependent and precarious ſituation; and is the only diſpoſition of mind which can enable him to enjoy eaſe and quiet here, and happineſs hereafter: yet was this important precept entirely unknown until it was promulgated by him, who ſaid, "Suffer little chil-
" dren to come unto me, and forbid them
" not; for of ſuch is the kingdom of hea-
" ven: Verily I ſay unto you, whoever ſhall
" not receive the kingdom of God as a little
" child, he ſhall not enter therein *."

Another precept, equally new and no leſs excellent, is forgiveneſs of injuries: "Ye
" have heard," ſays Chriſt to his diſciples,
" Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour, and hate
" thine enemy; but I ſay unto you, love
" your enemies, bleſs them that curſe you,
" do good to them that hate you, and pray
" for them which deſpitefully uſe you, and
" perſecute you †." This was a leſſon ſo new, and ſo utterly unknown, till taught by his

* Matt. x. 14. † Matt. v. 43.

doctrines,

doctrines, and enforced by his example, that the wiſeſt moraliſts of the wiſeſt nations and ages repreſented the deſire of revenge as a mark of a noble mind, and the accompliſhment of it as one of the chief felicities attendant on a fortunate man. But how much more magnanimous, how much more beneficial to mankind, is forgiveneſs! it is more magnanimous, becauſe every generous and exalted diſpoſition of the human mind is requiſite to the practice of it: for theſe alone can enable us to bear the wrongs and inſults of wickedneſs and folly with patience, and to look down on the perpetrators of them with pity, rather than indignation; theſe alone can teach us, that ſuch are but a part of thoſe ſufferings allotted to us in that ſtate of probation, and to know, that to overcome evil with good, is the moſt glorious of all victories: it is the moſt beneficial, becauſe this amiable conduct alone can put an end to an eternal ſucceſſion of injuries and retaliations; for every retaliation becomes a new injury, and requires another act of revenge for ſatisfaction. But would we obſerve this ſalutary precept, to love our enemies, and to do good to thoſe who deſpitefully uſe us, this obſtinate benevolence would at laſt conquer the moſt inveterate hearts, and we ſhould have no enemies to forgive. How much more exalted a character therefore is a Chriſtian martyr, ſuffering with reſignation, and praying for the guilty, than that of a Pagan hero,

hero, breathing revenge, and deſtroying the innocent! Yet, noble and uſeful as this virtue is, before the appearance of this religion it was not only unpractiſed, but decried in principle as mean and ignominious, though ſo obvious a remedy for moſt of the miſeries of this life, and ſo neceſſary a qualification for the happineſs of another.

A third precept, firſt noticed and firſt enjoined by this inſtitution, is charity to all men. What this is, we may beſt learn from this admirable deſcription, painted in the following words: "Charity ſuffereth long, "and is kind; charity envieth not; charity "vaunteth not itſelf; is not puffed up; doth "not behave itſelf unſeemly; ſeeketh not "her own; is not eaſily provoked; think-"eth no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but "rejoiceth in truth; feareth all things; be-"lieveth all things; hopeth all things; en-"dureth all things*." Here we have an accurate delineation of this bright conſtellation of all virtues; which conſiſts not, as many imagine, in the building of monaſteries, endowment of hoſpitals, or the diſtribution of alms; but in ſuch an amiable diſpoſition of mind, as exerciſes itſelf every hour in acts of kindneſs, patience, complacency, and benevolence to all around us, and which alone is able to promote happineſs in the preſent life, or render us capable

* 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

of

of receiving it in another: and yet this is totally new, and ſo it is declared to be by the author of it: "A new commandment I "give unto you, that ye love one another; "as I have loved you, that ye love one ano- "ther; by this ſhall all men know that ye "are my diſciples, if ye have love one to "another*." This benevolent diſpoſition is made the great characteriſtic of a Chriſtian, the teſt of his obedience, and the mark by which he is to be diſtinguiſhed. This love for each other is that charity juſt now deſcribed, and contains all thoſe qualities, which are there attributed to it; humility, patience, meekneſs, and beneficence: without which we muſt live in perpetual diſcord, and conſequently cannot pay obedience to this commandment by loving one another; a commandment ſo ſublime, ſo rational, and ſo beneficial, ſo wiſely calculated to correct the depravity, diminiſh the wickedneſs, and abate the miſeries of human nature, that did we univerſally comply with it, we ſhould ſoon be relieved from all the inquietudes ariſing from our own unruly paſſions, anger, envy, revenge, malice, and ambition, as well as from all thoſe injuries to which we are perpetually expoſed from the indulgence of the ſame paſſions in others. It would alſo preſerve our minds in ſuch a ſtate of tranquillity, and ſo prepare them for the kingdom of heaven, that we ſhould ſlide out of

* John xiii. 34.

a life

a life of peace, love, and benevolence, into that celeſtial ſociety, by an almoſt imperceptible tranſition. Yet was this commandment entirely new, when given by him, who ſo intitles it, and has made it the capital duty of his religion, becauſe the moſt indiſpenſably neceſſary to the attainment of its great object, the kingdom of heaven; into which if proud, turbulent, and vindictive ſpirits were permitted to enter, they muſt unavoidably deſtroy the happineſs of that ſtate by the operations of the ſame paſſions and vices by which they diſturb the preſent; and therefore all ſuch muſt be eternally excluded, not only as a puniſhment, but alſo from incapacity.

Repentance, by this we plainly ſee, is another new moral duty ſtrenuouſly inſiſted on by this religion, and by no other, becauſe abſolutely neceſſary to the accompliſhment of its end; for this alone can purge us from thoſe tranſgreſſions from which we cannot be totally exempted in this ſtate of trial and temptation, and purify us from that depravity in our nature, which renders us incapable of attaining this end. Hence alſo we may learn, that no repentance can remove this incapacity, but ſuch as entirely changes the nature and diſpoſition of the offender; which, in the language of ſcripture, is called "being born again." Mere contrition for his paſt crimes, nor even the pardon of them, cannot effect this, unleſs it operates to this entire

entire converſion or new birth, as it is properly and emphatically named: for ſorrow can no more purify a mind corrupted by a long continuance in vicious habits, than it can reſtore health to a body diſtempered by a long courſe of vice and intemperance. Hence alſo every one, who is in the leaſt acquainted with himſelf, may judge of the reaſonableneſs of the hope that is in him, and of his ſituation in a future ſtate by that of his preſent. If he feels in himſelf a temper proud, turbulent, vindictive, and malevolent, and a violent attachment to the pleaſures or buſineſs of the world, he may be aſſured, that he muſt be excluded from the kingdom of heaven; not only becauſe his conduct can merit no ſuch reward, but becauſe, if admitted, he would find there no objects ſatisfactory to his paſſions, inclinations, and purſuits, and therefore could only diſturb the happineſs of others without enjoying any ſhare of it himſelf.

Faith is another moral duty injoined by this inſtitution, of a ſpecies ſo new, that the philoſophers of antiquity had no word expreſſive of this idea, nor any ſuch idea to be expreſſed; for the word πιστις or *fides*, which we tranſlate faith, was never uſed by any Pagan writer in a ſenſe the leaſt ſimilar to that, to which it is applied in the New Teſtament: where in general it ſignifies an humble, teachable, and candid diſpoſition, a truſt in God, and confidence in his promiſe; when

when applied particularly to Chriſtianity, it means no more than a belief of this ſingle propoſition, That Chriſt was the ſon of God; that is, in the language of thoſe writings, the Meſſiah, who was foretold by the prophets, and expected by the Jews; who was ſent by God into the world to preach righteouſneſs, judgment, and everlaſting life, and to die as an atonement for the ſins of mankind. This was all that Chriſt required to be believed by thoſe who were willing to become his diſciples: he who does not believe this, is not a Chriſtian, and he who does, believes the whole that is eſſential to his profeſſion, and all that is properly comprehended under the name of faith. This unfortunate word has indeed been ſo tortured and ſo miſapplied to mean every abſurdity, which artifice could impoſe upon ignorance, that it has loſt all pretenſions to the title of virtue; but if brought back to the ſimplicity of its original ſignification, it will deſerve that name, becauſe it uſually ariſes from the moſt amiable diſpoſitions, and is always a direct contraſt to pride, obſtinacy, and ſelf-conceit. If taken in the extenſive ſenſe of an aſſent to the evidence of things not ſeen, it comprehends the exiſtence of a God, and a future ſtate, and is therefore not only itſelf a moral virtue, but the ſource from whence all others muſt proceed; for on the belief of theſe all religion and morality muſt entirely depend. It cannot be altogether void of moral

moral merit, (as ſome would repreſent it) becauſe it is in a degree voluntary; for daily experience ſhews us, that men not only pretend to, but actually do believe, and diſbelieve, almoſt any propoſitions, which beſt ſuit their intereſts, or inclinations, and unfeignedly change their ſincere opinions with their ſituations and circumſtances. For we have power over the mind's eye, as well as over the body's, to ſhut it againſt the ſtrongeſt rays of truth and religion, whenever they become painful to us, and to open it again to the faint glimmerings of ſcepticiſm and infidelity when we "love darkneſs rather than "light, becauſe our deeds are evil*." And this, I think, ſufficiently refutes all objections to the moral nature of faith, drawn from the ſuppoſition of its being quite involuntary, and neceſſarily dependent on the degree of evidence, which is offered to our underſtandings.

Self-abaſement is another moral duty inculcated by this religion only; which requires us to impute even our own virtues to the grace and favour of our Creator, and to acknowledge, that we can do nothing good by our own powers, unleſs aſſiſted by his over-ruling influence. This doctrine ſeems at firſt ſight to infringe on our free-will, and to deprive us of all merit; but, on a cloſer examination, the truth of it may be demon-

* John iii. 19.

ſtrated

ſtrated both by reaſon and experience, and that in fact it does not impair the one, or depreciate the other: and that it is productive of ſo much humility, reſignation, and dependance on God, that it juſtly claims a place amongſt the moſt illuſtrious moral virtues. Yet was this duty utterly repugnant to the proud and ſelf-ſufficient principles of the ancient philoſophers as well as modern Deiſts, and therefore before the publication of the goſpel totally unknown and uncomprehended.

Detachment from the world is another moral virtue conſtituted by this religion alone: ſo new, that even at this day few of its profeſſors can be perſuaded, that it is required, or that it is any virtue at all. By this detachment from the world is not to be underſtood a ſecluſion from ſociety, abſtraction from all buſineſs, or retirement to a gloomy cloyſter. Induſtry and labour, cheerfulneſs and hoſpitality are frequently recommended: nor is the acquiſition of wealth and honours prohibited, if they can be obtained by honeſt means, and a moderate degree of attention and care: but ſuch an unremitted anxiety, and perpetual application as engroſſes our whole time and thoughts, are forbid, becauſe they are incompatible with the ſpirit of this religion, and muſt utterly diſqualify us for the attainment of its great end. We toil on in the vain purſuits and frivolous occupations of the world, die in our

our harneſs, and then expect, if no gigantic crime ſtands in the way, to ſtep immediately into the kingdom of heaven: but this is impoſſible; for without a previous detachment from the buſineſs of this world, we cannot be prepared for the happineſs of another. Yet this could make no part of the morality of Pagans, becauſe their virtues were altogether connected with this buſineſs, and conſiſted chiefly in conducting it with honour to themſelves, and benefit to the public: but Chriſtianity has a nobler object in view, which, if not attended to, muſt be loſt for ever. This object is that celeſtial manſion of which we ſhould never loſe ſight, and to which we ſhould ever be advancing during our journey through life: but this by no means precludes us from performing the buſineſs, or enjoying the amuſements of travellers, provided they detain us not too long, or lead us too far out of our way.

It cannot be denied, that the great author of the Chriſtian inſtitution, firſt and ſingly ventured to oppoſe all the chief principles of Pagan virtue, and to introduce a religion directly oppoſite to thoſe erroneous though long-eſtabliſhed opinions, both in its duties and in its object. The moſt celebrated virtues of the ancients were high ſpirit, intrepid courage, and implacable reſentment.

Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer,

was the portrait of the moſt illuſtrious hero, drawn

drawn by one of the firſt poets of antiquity. To all theſe admired qualities, thoſe of a true Chriſtian are an exact contraſt; for this religion conſtantly enjoins poorneſs of ſpirit, meekneſs, patience, and forgiveneſs of injuries. "But I ſay unto you, that ye reſiſt "not evil; but whoever ſhall ſmite thee on "the right cheek, turn to him the other "alſo*." The favourite characters among the Pagans were the turbulent, ambitious, and intrepid, who through toils and dangers acquired wealth, and ſpent it in luxury, magnificence, and corruption; but both theſe are equally adverſe to the Chriſtian ſyſtem, which forbids all extraordinary efforts to obtain wealth, care to ſecure, or thought concerning the enjoyment of it. "Lay not "up for yourſelves treaſures on earth, &c. "Take no thought, ſaying what ſhall we "eat, or what ſhall we drink, or wherewithal "ſhall we be cloathed? for after all theſe "things, do the Gentiles ſeek†." The chief object of the Pagans was immortal fame: for this their poets ſang, their heroes fought, and their patriots died; and this was hung out by their philoſophers and legiſlators, as the great incitement to all noble and virtuous deeds. But what ſays the Chriſtian legiſlator to his diſciples on this ſubject? "Bleſſed are ye, when men ſhall revile you, "and ſhall ſay all manner of evil againſt you,

* Matt. v. 39. † Matt. vi. 31.

"for

" for my ſake; rejoice, and be exceeding " glad, for great is your reward in heaven *." So widely different is the genius of the Pagan and Chriſtian morality, that I will venture to affirm, that the moſt celebrated virtues of the former are moſt oppoſite to the ſpirit, and more inconſiſtent with the end of the latter, than even their moſt infamous vices; and that a Brutus wrenching vengeance out of his hands to whom alone it belongs, by murdering the oppreſſor of his country, or a Cato murdering himſelf from an impatience of controul, leaves the world more unqualified for, and more inadmiſſible into, the kingdom of heaven, than even a Meſſalina, or an Heliogabalus, with all their profligacy about them.

Nothing, I believe, has ſo much contributed to corrupt the true ſpirit of the Chriſtian inſtitution, as that partiality, which we contract from our earlieſt education for the manners of Pagan antiquity: from whence we learn to adopt every moral idea, which is repugnant to it; to applaud falſe virtues, which that diſavows; to be guided by laws of honour, which that abhors; to imitate characters, which that deteſts; and to behold heroes, patriots, conquerors, and ſuicides with admiration, whoſe conduct that utterly condemns. From a coalition of theſe oppoſite principles was generated that monſtrous

* Matt. v. 11.

ſyſtem of cruelty and benevolence, of barbariſm and civility, of rapine and juſtice, of fighting and devotion, of revenge and generoſity, which harraſſed the world for ſeveral centuries with cruſades, holy wars, knight-errantry, and ſingle combats, and even ſtill retains influence enough, under the name of honour, to defeat the moſt beneficent ends of this holy inſtitution. I mean not by this to paſs any cenſure on the principles of valour, patriotiſm, or honour: they may be uſeful, and perhaps neceſſary, in the commerce and buſineſs of the preſent turbulent and imperfect ſtate; and thoſe who are actuated by them may be virtuous, honeſt, and even religious men: all that I aſſert is, that they cannot be Chriſtians. A profligate may be a Chriſtian, though a bad one, becauſe he may be overpowered by paſſions and temptations, and his actions may contradict his principles; but a man, whoſe ruling principle is honour, however virtuous he may be, cannot be a Chriſtian, becauſe he erects a ſtandard of duty, and deliberately adheres to it, diametrically oppoſite to the whole tenour of that religion.

The contraſt between the Chriſtian, and all other inſtitutions religious or moral, previous to its appearance, is ſufficiently evident, and ſurely the ſuperiority of the former is as little to be diſputed; unleſs any one ſhall undertake to prove, that humility, patience, forgiveneſs, and benevolence are leſs amiable,

amiable, and leſs beneficial qualities, than pride, turbulence, revenge, and malignity: that the contempt of riches is leſs noble, than the acquiſition by fraud and villainy, or the diſtribution of them to the poor, leſs commendable than avarice or profuſion; or that a real immortality in the kingdom of heaven is an object leſs exalted, leſs rational, and leſs worthy of purſuit, than an imaginary immortality in the applauſe of men: that worthleſs tribute, which the folly of one part of mankind pays to the wickedneſs of the other; a tribute, which a wiſe man ought always to deſpiſe, becauſe a good man can ſcarce ever obtain.

CONCLUSION.

IF I miſtake not, I have now fully eſtabliſhed the truth of my three propoſitions.

Firſt, That there is now extant a book intitled the New Teſtament.

Secondly, That from this book may be extracted a ſyſtem of religion entirely new; both in its object, and its doctrines, not only ſuperior to, but totally unlike, every thing, which had ever before entered into the mind of man.

Thirdly, That from this book may likewiſe be collected a ſyſtem of ethics, in which

every moral precept founded on reaſon is carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than in any other of the wiſeſt philoſophers of preceding ages; every moral precept founded on falſe principles totally omitted, and many new precepts added, peculiarly correſponding with the new object of this religion.

Every one of theſe propoſitions, I am perſuaded, is incontrovertibly true; and if true, this ſhort but certain concluſion muſt inevitably follow; that ſuch a ſyſtem of religion and morality could not poſſibly have been the work of any man, or ſet of men, much leſs of thoſe obſcure, ignorant, and illiterate perſons who actually did diſcover, and publiſh it to the world; and that therefore it muſt have been effected by the ſupernatural interpoſition of divine power and wiſdom; that is, that it muſt derive its origin from God.

This argument ſeems to me little ſhort of demonſtration, and is indeed founded on the very ſame reaſoning, by which the material world is proved to be the work of his inviſible hand. We view with admiration the heavens and the earth, and all therein contained; we contemplate with amazement the minute bodies of animals too ſmall for perception, and the immenſe planetary orbs too vaſt for imagination: We are certain that theſe cannot be the works of man; and therefore we conclude with reaſon, that they

muſt

muſt be the productions of an omnipotent Creator. In the ſame manner we ſee here a ſcheme of religion and morality unlike and ſuperior to all ideas of the human mind, equally impoſſible to have been diſcovered by the knowledge, as invented by the artifice of man; and therefore by the very ſame mode of reaſoning, and with the ſame juſtice, we conclude, that it muſt derive its origin from the ſame omnipotent and omniſcient Being.

Nor was the propagation of this religion leſs extraordinary than the religion itſelf, or leſs above the reach of all human power, than the diſcovery of it was above that of all human underſtanding. It is well known, that in the courſe of a very few years it was ſpread over all the principal parts of Aſia and of Europe, and this by the miniſtry only of an inconſiderable number of the moſt inconſiderable perſons; that at this time Paganiſm was in the higheſt repute, believed univerſally by the vulgar, and patroniſed by the great; that the wiſeſt men of the wiſeſt nations aſſiſted at its ſacrifices, and conſulted its oracles on the moſt important occaſions: Whether theſe were the tricks of the prieſts or of the devil, is of no conſequence, as they were both equally unlikely to be converted, or overcome; the fact is certain, that on the preaching of a few fiſhermen, their altars were deſerted, and their deities were dumb. This miracle they undoubtedly performed, whatever

whatever we may think of the reſt: and this is ſurely ſufficient to prove the authority of their commiſſion; and to convince us, that neither their undertaking nor the execution of it could poſſibly be their own.

How much this divine inſtitution has been corrupted, or how ſoon theſe corruptions began, how far it has been diſcoloured by the falſe notions of illiterate ages, or blended with fictions by pious frauds, or how early theſe notions and fictions were introduced, no learning or ſagacity is now able preciſely to aſcertain; but ſurely no man, who ſeriouſly conſiders the excellence and novelty of its doctrines, the manner in which it was at firſt propagated through the world, the perſons who atchieved that wonderful work, and the originality of thoſe writings in which it is ſtill recorded, can poſſibly believe that it could ever have been the production of impoſture, or chance; or that from an impoſture the moſt wicked and blaſphemous (for if an impoſture, ſuch it is) all the religion and virtue now exiſting on earth can derive their ſource.

But notwithſtanding what has been here urged, if any man can believe, that at a time when the literature of Greece and Rome, then in their meridian luſtre, were inſufficient for the taſk, the ſon of a carpenter, together with twelve of the meaneſt and moſt illiterate mechanics, his aſſociates, unaſſiſted by any ſupernatural power, ſhould be able

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to diſcover or invent a ſyſtem of theology the moſt ſublime, and of ethics the moſt perfect, which had eſcaped the penetration and learning of Plato, Ariſtotle, and Cicero; and that from this ſyſtem, by their own ſagacity, they had excluded every falſe virtue, though univerſally admired, and admitted every true virtue, though deſpiſed and ridiculed by all the reſt of the world: If any one can believe that theſe men could become impoſtors, for no other purpoſe than the propagation of truth, villains for no end but to teach honeſty, and martyrs without the leaſt proſpect of honour or advantage; or that, if all this ſhould have been poſſible, theſe few inconſiderable perſons ſhould have been able, in the courſe of a few years, to have ſpread this their religion over moſt parts of the then known world, in oppoſition to the intereſts, pleaſures, ambition, prejudices, and even reaſon of mankind; to have triumphed over the power of princes, the intrigues of ſtates, the force of cuſtom, the blindneſs of zeal, the influence of prieſts, the arguments of orators, and the philoſophy of the world, without any ſupernatural aſſiſtance; if any one can believe all theſe miraculous events, contradictory to the conſtant experience of the powers and diſpoſitions of human nature, he muſt be poſſeſſed of much more faith than is neceſſary to make him a Chriſtian, and remain an unbeliever from mere credulity.

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But ſhould theſe credulous infidels after all be in the right, and this pretended revelation be all a fable; from believing it what harm could enſue? Would it render princes more tyrannical, or ſubjects more ungovernable? the rich more inſolent, or the poor more diſorderly? Would it make worſe parents or children, huſbands or wives, maſters or ſervants, friends or neighbours? Or would it not make men more virtuous, and conſequently more happy in every ſituation? It could not be criminal; it could not be detrimental. It could not be criminal, becauſe it cannot be a crime to aſſent to ſuch evidence, as has been able to convince the beſt and wiſeſt of mankind; by which, if falſe, Providence muſt have permitted men to deceive each other, for the moſt beneficial ends, and which therefore it would be ſurely more meritorious to believe, from a diſpoſition of faith and charity, which believeth all things, than to reject with ſcorn from obſtinacy and ſelf-conceit: It cannot be detrimental, becauſe if Chriſtianity is a fable, it is a fable, the belief of which is the only principle which can retain men in a ſteady and uniform courſe of virtue, piety, and devotion, or can ſupport them in the hour of diſtreſs, of ſickneſs, and of death. Whatever might be the operations of true deiſm on the minds of Pagan philoſophers, that can now avail us nothing: for that light which once lightened the Gentiles, is now abſorbed in the brighter

brighter illumination of the goſpel; we can now form no rational ſyſtem of deiſm, but what muſt be borrowed from that ſource, and, as far as it reaches towards perfection, muſt be exactly the ſame; and therefore if we will not accept of Chriſtianity, we can have no religion at all. Accordingly we ſee, that thoſe who fly from this, ſcarce ever ſtop at deiſm; but haſten on with great alacrity to a total rejection of all religious and moral principles whatever.

If I have here demonſtrated the divine origin of the Chriſtian religion by an argument which cannot be confuted; no others, however plauſible or numerous, founded on probabilities, doubts, and conjectures, can ever diſprove it, becauſe if it is once ſhewn to be true, it cannot be falſe. But as many arguments of this kind have bewildered ſome candid and ingenuous minds, I ſhall here beſtow a few lines on thoſe which have the moſt weight, in order to wipe out, or at leaſt to diminiſh, their perplexing influence.

But here I muſt previouſly obſerve, that the moſt unſurmountable, as well as the moſt uſual obſtacle to our belief, ariſes from our paſſions, appetites, and intereſts; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the underſtanding, we oftener diſbelieve for want of inclination, than want of evidence. The firſt ſtep towards thinking this revelation true, is our hopes that it is ſo; for whenever we much wiſh any propoſition to be true,

true, we are not far from believing it. It is certainly for the intereſt of all good men, that its authority ſhould be well founded; and ſtill more beneficial to the bad, if ever they intend to be better; becauſe it is the only ſyſtem either of reaſon or religion which can give them any aſſurance of pardon. The puniſhment of vice is a debt due to juſtice, which cannot be remitted without compenſation: repentance can be no compenſation; it may change a wicked man's diſpoſitions, and prevent his offending for the future, but can lay no claim to pardon for what is paſt. If any one by profligacy and extravagance contracts a debt, repentance may make him wiſer, and hinder him from running into further diſtreſſes, but can never pay off his old bonds; for which he muſt be ever accountable, unleſs they are diſcharged by himſelf, or ſome other in his ſtead: this very diſcharge Chriſtianity alone holds forth on our repentance, and, if true, will certainly perform: the truth of it therefore muſt ardently be wiſhed for by all, except the wicked, who are determined neither to repent or reform. It is well worth every man's while, who either is, or intends to be virtuous, to believe Chriſtianity, if he can; becauſe he will find it the ſureſt preſervative againſt all vicious habits and their attendant evils, the beſt reſource under diſtreſſes and diſappointments, ill health, and ill fortune, and the firmeſt baſis on which contemplation can reſt; and

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without ſome, the human mind is never perfectly at eaſe. But if any one is attached to a favourite pleaſure, or eagerly engaged in worldly purſuits incompatible with the precepts of this religion, and he believes it, he muſt either relinquiſh thoſe purſuits with uneaſineſs, or perſiſt in them with remorſe and diſſatisfaction, and therefore muſt commence unbeliever in his own defence. With ſuch I ſhall not diſpute, nor pretend to perſuade men by arguments to make themſelves miſerable: but to thoſe, who, not afraid that this religion may be true, are really affected by ſuch objections, I will offer the following anſwers, which, though ſhort, will, I doubt not, be ſufficient to ſhew them their weakneſs and futility.

In the firſt place, then, ſome have been ſo bold as to ſtrike at the root of all revelation from God, by aſſerting, that it is incredible, becauſe unneceſſary, and unneceſſary, becauſe the reaſon which he has beſtowed on mankind is ſufficiently able to diſcover all the religious and moral duties which he requires of them, if they would but attend to her precepts, and be guided by her friendly admonitions. Mankind have undoubtedly at various times from the remoteſt ages received ſo much knowledge by divine communications, and have ever been ſo much inclined to impute it all to their own ſufficiency, that it is now difficult to determine what human reaſon unaſſiſted can effect: But to form a true judgment on this ſubject,

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let us turn our eyes to thoſe remote regions of the globe, to which this ſupernatural aſſiſtance has never yet extended, and we ſhall there ſee men endued with ſenſe and reaſon not inferior to our own, ſo far from being capable of forming ſyſtems of religion and morality, that they are at this day totally unable to make a nail or a hatchet: from whence we may ſurely be convinced, that reaſon alone is ſo far from being ſufficient to offer to mankind a perfect religion, that it has never yet been able to lead them to any degree of culture or civilization whatever. Theſe have uniformly flowed from that great fountain of divine communication opened in the eaſt, in the earlieſt ages, and thence been gradually diffuſed in ſalubrious ſtreams, throughout the various regions of the earth. Their riſe and progreſs, by ſurveying the hiſtory of the world, may eaſily be traced backwards to their ſource; and wherever theſe have not as yet been able to penetrate, we there find the human ſpecies not only void of all true religious and moral ſentiments, but not the leaſt emerged from their original ignorance and barbarity; which ſeems a demonſtration, that although human reaſon is capable of progreſſion in ſcience, yet the firſt foundations muſt be laid by ſupernatural inſtructions: for ſurely no other probable cauſe can be aſſigned, why one part of mankind ſhould have made ſuch an amazing progreſs in religious, moral, metaphyſical, and philoſophical

phical enquiries; ſuch wonderful improvements in policy, legiſlation, commerce, and manufactures, while the other part, formed with the ſame natural capacities, and divided only by ſeas and mountains, ſhould remain, during the ſame number of ages, in a ſtate little ſuperior to brutes, without government, without laws or letters, and even without clothes and habitations; murdering each other to ſatiate their revenge, and devouring each other to appeaſe their hunger: I ſay, no cauſe can be aſſigned for this amazing difference, except that the firſt have received information from thoſe divine communications recorded in the ſcriptures, and the latter have never yet been favoured with ſuch aſſiſtance. This remarkable contraſt ſeems an unanſwerable, though perhaps a new proof of the neceſſity of revelation, and a ſolid refutation of all arguments againſt it, drawn from the ſufficiency of human reaſon. And as reaſon in her natural ſtate is thus incapable of making any progreſs in knowledge; ſo when furniſhed with materials by ſupernatural aid, if left to the guidance of her own wild imaginations, ſhe falls into more numerous and more groſs errors than her own native ignorance could ever have ſuggeſted. There is then no abſurdity ſo extravagant, which ſhe is not ready to adopt: ſhe has perſuaded ſome, that there is no God; others, that there can be no future ſtate: ſhe has taught ſome, that there

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is no difference between vice and virtue, and that to cut a man's throat and to relieve his neceſſities are actions equally meritorious: ſhe has convinced many, that they have no free-will, in oppoſition to their own experience; ſome, that there can be no ſuch thing as ſoul, or ſpirit, contrary to their own perceptions; and others, no ſuch thing as matter or body, in contradiction to their ſenſes. By analyſing all things ſhe can ſhew, that there is nothing in any thing; by perpetual ſifting ſhe can reduce all exiſtence to the inviſible duſt of ſcepticiſm; and by recurring to firſt principles, prove to the ſatisfaction of her followers, that there are no principles at all. How far ſuch a guide is to be depended on in the important concerns of religion, and morals, I leave to the judgment of every conſiderate man to determine. This is certain, that human reaſon in its higheſt ſtate of cultivation amongſt the philoſophers of Greece and Rome, was never able to form a religion comparable to Chriſtianity; nor have all thoſe ſources of moral virtue, ſuch as truth, beauty, and the fitneſs of things, which modern philoſophers have endeavoured to ſubſtitute in its ſtead, ever been effectual to produce good men, and have themſelves often been the productions of ſome of the worſt.

Others there are, who allow, that a revelation from God may be both neceſſary and credible; but alledge, that the ſcriptures, that

that is, the books of the Old and New Teſtament, cannot be that revelation; becauſe in them are to be found errors and inconſiſtencies, fabulous ſtories, falſe facts, and falſe philoſophy; which can never be derived from the fountain of all wiſdom and truth. To this I reply, that I readily acknowledge, that the ſcriptures are not revelations from God, but the hiſtory of them: This revelation itſelf is derived from God; but the hiſtory of it is the production of men, and therefore the truth of it is not in the leaſt affected by their fallibility, but depends on the internal evidence of its own ſupernatural excellence. If in theſe books ſuch a religion, as has been here deſcribed, actually exiſts, no ſeeming, or even real defects to be found in them can diſprove the divine origin of this religion, or invalidate my argument. Let us, for inſtance, grant that the Moſaic hiſtory of the creation was founded on the erroneous but popular principles of thoſe early ages, who imagined the earth to be a vaſt plain, and the celeſtial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it; will it from thence follow, that Moſes could not be a proper inſtrument in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a divine law, becauſe he was not inſpired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian ſyſtems? or that Chriſt muſt be an impoſtor, becauſe Moſes was not an aſtronomer?

nomer? Let us alſo ſuppoſe, that the accounts of Chriſt's temptation in the wilderneſs, the devil's taking refuge in the herd of ſwine, with ſeveral other narrations in the New Teſtament, frequently ridiculed by unbelievers, were all but ſtories accommodated to the ignorance and ſuperſtitions of the times and countries in which they were written, or pious frauds intended to impreſs on vulgar minds a higher reverence of the power and ſanctity of Chriſt; will this in the leaſt impeach the excellence of his religion, or the authority of its founder? or is Chriſtianity anſwerable for all the fables of which it may have been the innocent occaſion? The want of this obvious diſtinction has much injured the Chriſtian cauſe; becauſe on this ground it has ever been moſt ſucceſsfully attacked, and on this ground it is not eaſily to be defended: for if the records of this revelation are ſuppoſed to be the revelation itſelf, the leaſt defect diſcovered in them muſt be fatal to the whole. What has led many to overlook this diſtinction, is that common phraſe, that the ſcriptures are the word of God; and in one ſenſe they certainly are; that is, they are the ſacred repoſitory of all the revelations, diſpenſations, promiſes, and precepts, which God has vouchſafed to communicate to mankind; but by this expreſſion we are not to underſtand, that every part of this voluminous collection of hiſtorical, poetical, prophetical, theological,

logical, and moral writings, which we call the Bible, was dictated by the immediate influence of Divine inſpiration: the authors of theſe books pretend to no ſuch infallibility, and if they claim it not for themſelves, who has the authority to claim it for them? Chriſt required no ſuch belief from thoſe who were willing to be his diſciples. He ſays, "He "that believeth on me, hath everlaſting "life*;" but where does he ſay, He that believeth not every word contained in the Old Teſtament, which was then extant, or every word in the New Teſtament, which was to be wrote for the inſtruction of future generations, hath not everlaſting life? There are innumerable occurrences related in the ſcriptures, ſome of greater, ſome of leſs, and ſome of no importance at all; the truth of which we can have no reaſon to queſtion, but the belief of them is ſurely not eſſential to the faith of a Chriſtian: I have no doubt but that St. Paul was ſhipwrecked, and that he left his cloak and his parchments at Troas; but the belief of theſe facts makes no part of Chriſtianity, nor is the truth of them any proof of its authority. It proves only that this Apoſtle could not in common life be under the perpetual influence of infallible inſpiration; for, had he been ſo, he would not have put to ſea before a ſtorm, nor have forgot his cloak. Theſe writers were undoubt-

* John vi. 47.

edly directed by ſupernatural influence in all things neceſſary to the great work, which they were appointed to perform: At particular times, and on particular occaſions, they were enabled to utter prophecies, to ſpeak languages, and to work miracles; but in all other circumſtances, they ſeem to have been left to the direction of their own underſtandings, like other men. In the ſciences of hiſtory, geography, aſtronomy, and philoſophy, they appear to have been no better inſtructed than others, and therefore were not leſs liable to be miſled by the errors and prejudices of the times and countries in which they lived. They related facts like honeſt men, to the beſt of their knowledge or information, and they recorded the divine leſſons of their maſter with the utmoſt fidelity; but they pretended to no infallibility, for they ſometimes differed in their relations, and they ſometimes diſagreed in their ſentiments. All which proves only, that they did not act, or write, in a combination to deceive, but not in the leaſt impeaches the truth of the revelation which they publiſhed; which depends not on any external evidence whatever: for I will venture to affirm, that if any one could prove, what is impoſſible to be proved, becauſe it is not true, that there are errors in geography, chronology, and philoſophy, in every page of the Bible; that the prophecies therein delivered are all but fortunate gueſſes, or artful applications, and the miracles there recorded

recorded no better than legendary tales: if any one could ſhew, that theſe books were never written by their pretended authors, but were poſterior impoſitions on illiterate and credulous ages: all theſe wonderful diſcoveries would prove no more than this, that God, for reaſons to us unknown, had thought proper to permit a revelation by him communicated to mankind, to be mixed with their ignorance, and corrupted by their frauds from its earlieſt infancy, in the ſame manner in which he has viſibly permitted it to be mixed, and corrupted from that period to the preſent hour. If in theſe books a religion ſuperior to all human imagination actually exiſts, it is of no conſequence to the proof of its divine origin, by what means it was there introduced, or with what human errors and imperfections it is blended. A diamond, though found in a bed of mud, is ſtill a diamond, nor can the dirt, which ſurrounds it, depreciate its value or deſtroy its luſtre.

To ſome ſpeculative and refined obſervers, it has appeared incredible, that a wiſe and benevolent Creator ſhould have conſtituted a world upon one plan, and a religion for it on another; that is, that he ſhould have revealed a religion to mankind, which not only contradicts the principal paſſions and inclinations which he has implanted in their natures, but is incompatible with the whole œconomy of that world which he has cre-

ated, and in which he has thought proper to place them. This, ſay they, with regard to the Chriſtian is apparently the caſe: the love of power, riches, honour, and fame, are the great incitements to generous and magnanimous actions; yet by this inſtitution are all theſe depreciated and diſcouraged. Government is eſſential to the nature of man, and cannot be managed without certain degrees of violence, corruption, and impoſition; yet are all theſe ſtrictly forbid. Nations cannot ſubſiſt without wars, nor war be carried on without rapine, deſolation, and murder; yet are theſe prohibited under the ſevereſt threats. The non-reſiſtance of evil muſt ſubject individuals to continual oppreſſions, and leave nations a defenceleſs prey to their enemies; yet is this recommended. Perpetual patience under inſults and injuries muſt every day provoke new inſults and new injuries; yet is this enjoined. A neglect of all we eat and drink and wear, muſt put an end to all commerce, manufactures, and induſtry; yet is this required. In ſhort, were theſe precepts univerſally obeyed, the diſpoſition of all human affairs muſt be entirely changed, and the buſineſs of the world, conſtituted as it now is, could not go on. To all this I anſwer, that ſuch indeed is the Chriſtian revelation, though ſome of its advocates may perhaps be unwilling to own it, and ſuch it is conſtantly declared to be by him who gave it, as well as by thoſe who

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publiſhed it under his immediate direction: To theſe he ſays, "If ye were of the world, "the world would love his own; but be- "cauſe ye are not of the world, but I have "choſen you out of the world, therefore the "world hateth you *." To the Jews he declares, "Ye are of this world: I am not of "this world †." St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Be not conformed to this world ‡;" and to the Corinthians, "We ſpeak not the "wiſdom of this world §." St. James ſays, "Know ye not, that the friendſhip of the "world is enmity with God? whoſoever "therefore will be a friend of the world is "the enemy of God ‖." This irreconcileable diſagreement between Chriſtianity and the world is announced in numberleſs other places in the New Teſtament, and indeed by the whole tenour of thoſe writings. Theſe are plain declarations, which, in ſpite of all the evaſions of thoſe good managers, who chooſe to take a little of this world in their way to heaven, ſtand fixed and immoveable againſt all their arguments drawn from public benefit and pretended neceſſity, and muſt ever forbid any reconciliation between the purſuits of this world and the Chriſtian inſtitution: but they who reject it on this account, enter not into the ſublime ſpirit of this reli-

* John xv. 19.
† John viii. 23.
‡ Rom. xii. 2.
§ 1 Cor. ii. 6.
‖ Jam. iv. 4.

gion,

gion, which is not a code of preciſe laws deſigned for the well-ordering ſociety, adapted to the ends of worldly convenience, and amenable to the tribunal of human prudence; but a divine leſſon of purity and perfection, ſo far ſuperior to the low conſiderations of conqueſt, government, and commerce, that it takes no more notice of them, than of the battles of game-cocks, the policy of bees, or the induſtry of ants: they recollect not what is the firſt and principal object of this inſtitution; that this is not, as has been often repeated, to make us happy, or even virtuous in the preſent life, for the ſake of augmenting our happineſs here; but to conduct us through a ſtate of dangers and ſufferings, of ſin and temptation, in ſuch a manner as to qualify us for the enjoyment of happineſs hereafter. All other inſtitutions of religion and morals were made for the world, but the characteriſtic of this is to be againſt it; and therefore the merits of Chriſtian doctrines are not to be weighed in the ſcales of public utility, like thoſe of moral precepts, becauſe worldly utility is not their end. If Chriſt and his Apoſtles had pretended, that the religion which they preached would advance the power, wealth, and proſperity of nations, or of men, they would have deſerved but little credit; but they conſtantly profeſs the contrary, and every where declare, that their religion is adverſe to the world, and all its purſuits. Chriſt ſays, ſpeaking

ſpeaking of his diſciples, "They are not of "the world, even as I am not of the world *." It can therefore be no imputation on this religion, or on any of its precepts, that they tend not to an end which their author profeſſedly diſclaims: nor can it ſurely be deemed a defect, that it is adverſe to the vain purſuits of this world; for ſo are reaſon, wiſdom, and experience; they all teach us the ſame leſſon, they all demonſtrate to us every day, that theſe are begun on falſe hopes, carried on with diſquietude, and end in diſappointment. This profeſſed incompatibility with the little, wretched, and iniquitous buſineſs of the world, is therefore ſo far from being a defect in this religion, that, was there no other proof of its divine origin, this alone, I think, would be abundantly ſufficient. The great plan and benevolent deſign of this diſpenſation is plainly this; to enlighten the minds, purify the religion, and amend the morals of mankind in general, and to ſelect the moſt meritorious of them to be ſucceſſively tranſplanted into the kingdom of heaven: which gracious offer is impartially tendered to all, who by perſeverance in meekneſs, patience, piety, charity, and a detachment from the world, are willing to qualify themſelves for this holy and happy ſociety. Was this univerſally accepted, and did every man obſerve ſtrictly

* John xvii. 16.

every

every precept of the goſpel, the face of human affairs and the œconomy of the world would indeed be greatly changed; but ſurely they would be changed for the better; and we ſhould enjoy much more happineſs, even here, than at preſent: for we muſt not forget, that evils are by it forbid as well as reſiſtance; injuries, as well as revenge; all unwillingneſs to diffuſe the enjoyments of life, as well as ſolicitude to acquire them; all obſtacles to ambition, as well as ambition itſelf; and therefore all contentions for power and intereſt would be at an end; and the world would go on much more happily than it now does. But this univerſal acceptance of ſuch an offer was never expected from ſo depraved and imperfect a creature as man, and therefore could never have been any part of the deſign: for it was foreknown and foretold by him who made it, that few, very few would accept it on theſe terms. He ſays, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is "the way which leadeth into life, and few "there be that find it*." Accordingly we ſee, that very few are prevailed on, by the hopes of future happineſs, to relinquiſh the purſuits of preſent pleaſures or intereſts, and therefore theſe purſuits are little interrupted by the receſſion of ſo inconſiderable a number. As the natural world ſubſiſts by the ſtruggles of the ſame elements, ſo does the

* Matt. vii. 4.

moral

moral by the contentions of the ſame paſſions, as from the beginning: the generality of mankind are actuated by the ſame motives, fight, ſcuffle, and ſcramble for power, riches, and pleaſures with the ſame eagerneſs: all occupations and profeſſions are exerciſed with the ſame alacrity, and there are ſoldiers, lawyers, ſtateſmen, patriots, and politicians, juſt as if Chriſtianity had never exiſted. Thus we ſee this wonderful diſpenſation has anſwered all the purpoſes for which it was intended: it has enlightened the minds, purified the religion, and amended the morals of mankind; and, without ſubverting the conſtitution, policy, or buſineſs of the world, opened a gate, though a ſtrait one, through which all, who are wiſe enough to chooſe it, and good enough to be fit for it, may find an entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Others have ſaid, that if this revelation had really been from God, his infinite power and goodneſs could never have ſuffered it to have been ſo ſoon perverted from its original purity, to have continued in a ſtate of corruption through the courſe of ſo many ages, and at laſt to have proved ſo ineffectual to the reformation of mankind. To theſe I anſwer, that all this, on examination, will be found inevitable, from the nature of all revelations communicated to ſo imperfect a creature as man, and from circumſtances peculiar to the riſe and progreſs of the

the Chriſtian in particular: for when this was firſt preached to the Gentile nations, though they were not able to withſtand the force of its evidence, and therefore received it; yet they could not be prevailed on to relinquiſh their old ſuperſtitions, and former opinions, but choſe rather to incorporate them with it: by which means it was neceſſarily mixed with their ignorance, and their learning; by both which it was equally injured. The people defaced its worſhip by blending it with their idolatrous ceremonies, and the philoſophers corrupted its doctrines by weaving them up with the notions of the Gnoſtics, Myſtics, and Manichæans, the prevailing ſyſtems of thoſe times. By degrees its irreſiſtible excellence gained over princes, potentates, and conquerors to its intereſts, and it was ſupported by their patronage: but that patronage ſoon engaged it in their policies and conteſts, and deſtroyed that excellence by which it had been acquired. At length the meek and humble profeſſors of the goſpel enſlaved theſe princes, and conquered theſe conquerors their patrons, and erected for themſelves ſuch a ſtupendous fabric of wealth and power, as the world had never ſeen: they then propagated their religion by the ſame methods, by which it had been perſecuted; nations were converted by fire and ſword, and the vanquiſhed were baptized with daggers at their throats. All theſe events we ſee proceed from a chain of cauſes

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and conſequences, which could not have been broken without changing the eſtabliſhed courſe of things by a conſtant ſeries of miracles, or a total alteration of human nature: whilſt that continues as it is, the pureſt religion muſt be corrupted by a conjunction with power and riches, and it will alſo then appear to be much more corrupted than it really is; becauſe many are inclined to think, that every deviation from its primitive ſtate is a corruption. Chriſtianity was at firſt preached by the poor and mean, in holes and caverns, under the iron rod of perſecution, and therefore many abſurdly conclude, that any degree of wealth or power in its miniſters, or of magnificence in its worſhip, are corruptions inconſiſtent with the genuine ſimplicity of its original ſtate: they are offended, that modern biſhops ſhould poſſeſs titles, palaces, revenues, and coaches, when it is notorious, that their predeceſſors the Apoſtles were deſpicable wanderers, without houſes or money, and walked on foot. The Apoſtles indeed lived in a ſtate of poverty and perſecution attendant on their particular ſituation, and the work which they had undertaken; this was their misfortune, but no part of their religion, and therefore it can be no more incumbent on their ſucceſſors to imitate their poverty and meanneſs, than to be whipped, impriſoned, and put to death, in compliance with their example. Theſe are all but the ſuggeſtions of envy and malevolence,

violence, but no objections to theſe fortunate alterations in Chriſtianity and its profeſſors; which, if not abuſed to the purpoſes of tyranny, and ſuperſtition, are in fact no more than the neceſſary and proper effects of its more proſperous ſituation. When a poor man grows rich, or a ſervant becomes a maſter, they ſhould take care that their exaltation prompts them not to be unjuſt or inſolent; but ſurely it is not requiſite or right, that their behaviour and mode of living ſhould be exactly the ſame, when their ſituation is altered. How far this inſtitution has been effectual to the reformation of mankind, it is not eaſy now to aſcertain, becauſe the enormities which prevailed before the appearance of it are by time ſo far removed from our ſight, that they are ſcarcely viſible; but thoſe of the moſt gigantic ſize ſtill remain in the records of hiſtory, as monuments of the reſt: Wars in thoſe ages were carried on with a ferocity and cruelty unknown to the preſent: whole cities and nations were extirpated by fire and ſword; and thouſands of the vanquiſhed were crucified and impaled for having endeavoured only to defend themſelves and their country. The lives of new-born infants were then intirely at the diſpoſal of their parents, who were at liberty to bring them up, or to expoſe them to periſh by cold and hunger, or to be devoured by birds and beaſts; and this was frequently practiſed without puniſhment, and

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even without cenſure. Gladiators were employed by hundreds to cut one another to pieces in public theatres for the diverſion of the moſt polite aſſemblies; and though theſe combatants at firſt conſiſted of criminals only, by degrees men of the higheſt rank, and even ladies of the moſt illuſtrious families, enrolled themſelves in this honourable liſt. On many occaſions human ſacrifices were ordained; and at the funerals of rich and eminent perſons, great numbers of their ſlaves were murdered as victims pleaſing to their departed ſpirits. The moſt infamous obſcenities were made part of their religious worſhip, and the moſt unnatural luſts publickly avowed, and celebrated by their moſt admired poets. At the approach of Chriſtianity all theſe horrid abominations vaniſhed; and amongſt thoſe who firſt embraced it, ſcarce a ſingle vice was to be found: to ſuch an amazing degree of piety, charity, temperance, patience, and reſignation were the primitive converts exalted, that they ſeem literally to have been regenerated, and purified from all the imperfections of human nature; and to have purſued ſuch a conſtant and uniform courſe of devotion, innocence, and virtue, as, in the preſent times, it is almoſt as difficult for us to conceive as to imitate. If it is aſked, why ſhould not the belief of the ſame religion now produce the ſame effects? the anſwer is ſhort, becauſe it is not believed: The moſt ſovereign medi-

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cine can perform no cure, if the patient will not be perſuaded to take it. Yet notwithſtanding all impediments, it has certainly done a great deal towards diminiſhing the vices and correcting the diſpoſitions of mankind; and was it univerſally adopted in belief and practice, would totally eradicate both ſin and puniſhment. But this was never expected, or deſigned, or poſſible, becauſe, if their exiſtence did not ariſe from ſome neceſſity to us unknown, they never would have been permitted to exiſt at all; and therefore they can no more be extirpated, than they could have been prevented: for this would certainly be incompatible with the frame and conſtitution of this world, and in all probability with that of another. And this, I think, well accounts for that reſerve and obſcurity with which this religion was at firſt promulgated, and that want of irreſiſtible evidence of its truth, by which it might poſſibly have been enforced. Chriſt ſays to his diſciples, "To you it is given to "know the myſtery of the kingdom of God; "but unto them that are without, all theſe "things are done in parables; that ſeeing "they may ſee, and not perceive, and hear-"ing they may hear, and not underſtand; "leſt at any time they ſhould be converted, "and their ſins ſhould be forgiven them*." That is, to you by peculiar favour it is given

* Mark iv. 11, 12.

to

to know and underſtand the doctrines of my religion, and by that means to qualify yourſelves for the kingdom of heaven; but to the multitude without, that is to all mankind in general, this indulgence cannot be extended; becauſe that all men ſhould be exempted from ſin and puniſhment is utterly repugnant to the univerſal ſyſtem, and that conſtitution of things, which infinite wiſdom has thought proper to adopt.

Objections have likewiſe been raiſed to the divine authority of this religion from the incredibility of ſome of its doctrines, particularly of thoſe concerning the Trinity, and atonement for ſin by the ſufferings and death of Chriſt; the one contradicting all the principles of human reaſon, and the other all our ideas of divine juſtice. To theſe objections, I ſhall only ſay, that no arguments founded on principles, which we cannot comprehend, can poſſibly diſprove a propoſition already proved on principles which we do underſtand; and therefore that on this ſubject they ought not to be attended to: That three Beings ſhould be one Being, is a propoſition which certainly contradicts reaſon, that is, *our* reaſon; but it does not from thence follow, that it cannot be true; for there are many propoſitions which contradict our reaſon, and yet are demonſtrably true: one is the very firſt principle of all religion, the being of a God; for that any thing ſhould exiſt without a cauſe of its own exiſtence,

ence, are propoſitions equally contradictory to our reaſon; yet one of them muſt be true, or nothing could ever have exiſted: in like manner the over-ruling grace of the Creator, and the free-will of his creatures, his certain fore-knowledge of future events, and the uncertain contingency of thoſe events, are to our apprehenſions abſolute contradictions to each other; and yet the truth of every one of theſe is demonſtrable from Scripture, reaſon, and experience. All theſe difficulties ariſe from our imagining, that the mode of exiſtence of all Beings muſt be ſimilar to our own; that is, that they muſt all exiſt in time, and ſpace; and hence proceeds our embarraſſment on this ſubject. We know, that no two Beings, with whoſe mode of exiſtence we are acquainted, can exiſt in the ſame point of time, in the ſame point of ſpace, and that therefore they cannot be one: but how far Beings, whoſe mode of exiſtence bears no relation to time or ſpace, may be united, we cannot comprehend: and therefore the poſſibility of ſuch an union we cannot poſitively deny. In like manner our reaſon informs us, that the puniſhment of the innocent, inſtead of the guilty, is diametrically oppoſite to juſtice, rectitude, and all pretenſions to utility; but we ſhould alſo remember, that the ſhort line of our reaſon cannot reach to the bottom of this queſtion: it cannot inform us, by what means either guilt or puniſhment ever gained a place in the

the works of a Creator infinitely good and powerful, whoſe goodneſs muſt have induced him, and whoſe power muſt have enabled him, to exclude them: It cannot aſſure us, that ſome ſufferings of individuals are not neceſſary to the happineſs and well-being of the whole: It cannot convince us, that they do not actually ariſe from this neceſſity, or that, for this cauſe, they may not be required of us, and levied like a tax for the public benefit; or that this tax may not be paid by one Being, as well as another; and therefore, if voluntarily offered, be juſtly accepted from the innocent inſtead of the guilty. Of all theſe circumſtances we are totally ignorant; nor can our reaſon afford us any information, and therefore we are not able to aſſert, that this meaſure is contrary to juſtice, or void of utility: for unleſs we could firſt reſolve that great queſtion, Whence came evil? we can decide nothing on the diſpenſations of Providence; becauſe they muſt neceſſarily be connected with that undiſcoverable principle; and, as we know not the root of the diſeaſe, we cannot judge of what is, or is not, a proper and effectual remedy. It is remarkable, that, notwithſtanding all the ſeeming abſurdities of this doctrine, there is one circumſtance much in its favour; which is, that it has been univerſally adopted in all ages, as far as hiſtory can carry us back in our inquiries to the earlieſt times; in which we find all nations, civilized and barbarous, however differing in all other religi-

ous opinions, agreeing alone in the expediency of appeaſing their offended Deities by ſacrifices, that is, by the vicarious ſufferings of men or other animals. This notion could never have been derived from reaſon, becauſe it directly contradicts it; nor from ignorance, becauſe ignorance could never have contrived ſo unaccountable an expedient, nor have been uniform in all ages and countries in any opinion whatſoever; nor from the artifice of kings or prieſts, in order to acquire dominion over the people, becauſe it ſeems not adapted to this end; and we find it implanted in the minds of the moſt remote ſavages at this day diſcovered, who have neither kings or prieſts, artifice or dominion, amongſt them. It muſt therefore be derived from natural inſtinct or ſupernatural revelation, both which are equally the operations of divine power. If it is further urged, that however true theſe doctrines may be, yet it muſt be inconſiſtent with the juſtice and goodneſs of the Creator, to require from his creatures the belief of propoſitions which contradict, or are above the reach of that reaſon, which he has thought proper to beſtow upon them. To this I anſwer, that genuine Chriſtianity requires no ſuch belief: It has diſcovered to us many important truths, with which we were before intirely unacquainted; and amongſt them are theſe: that three Beings are ſome way united in the divine eſſence; and that God will accept of the ſufferings of Chriſt as an atonement

atonement for the ſins of mankind. Theſe, conſidered as declarations of facts only, neither contradict, or are above the reach of human reaſon: The firſt is a propoſition as plain, as that three equilateral lines compoſe one triangle; the other is as intelligible, as that one man ſhould diſcharge the debts of another. In what manner thisunion is formed, or why God accepts theſe vicarious puniſhments, or to what purpoſes they may be ſubſervient, it informs us not, becauſe no information could enable us to comprehend theſe myſteries; and therefore it does not require that we ſhould know or believe any thing about them. The truth of theſe doctrines muſt reſt intirely on the authority of thoſe who taught them; but then we ſhould reflect that thoſe were the ſame perſons who taught us a ſyſtem of religion more ſublime, and of ethics more perfect, than any which our faculties were ever able to diſcover, but which when diſcovered are exactly conſonant to our reaſon; and that therefore we ſhould not haſtily reject thoſe informations which they have vouchſafed to give us, of which our reaſon is not a competent judge. If an able mathematician proves to us the truth of ſeveral propoſitions by demonſtrations which we underſtand, we heſitate not on his authority to aſſent to others, the proceſs of whoſe proofs we are not able to follow: why therefore ſhould we refuſe that credit to Chriſt

and his Apoſtles, which we think reaſonable to give to one another?

Many have objected to the whole ſcheme of this revelation, as partial, fluctuating, indeterminate, unjuſt, and unworthy of an omniſcient and omnipotent author, who cannot be ſuppoſed to have favoured particular perſons, countries, and times, with this divine communication, while others no leſs meritorious have been altogether excluded from its benefits; nor to have changed and counteracted his own deſigns; that is, to have formed mankind able and diſpoſed to render themſelves miſerable by their own wickedneſs, and then to have contrived ſo ſtrange an expedient to reſtore them to that happineſs which they need never have been permitted to forfeit; and this to be brought about by the unneceſſary interpoſition of a mediator. To all this I ſhall only ſay, that however unaccountable this may appear to us, who ſee but as ſmall a part of the Chriſtian, as of the univerſal plan of creation, they are both in regard to all theſe circumſtances exactly analogous to each other. In all the diſpenſations of Providence, with which we are acquainted, benefits are diſtributed in a ſimilar manner; health and ſtrength, ſenſe and ſcience, wealth and power, are all beſtowed on individuals and communities in different degrees, and at different times. The whole œconomy of this world conſiſts of evils and remedies; and theſe for the moſt part adminiſtered

adminiſtered by the inſtrumentality of intermediate agents. God has permitted us to plunge ourſelves into poverty, diſtreſs, and miſery, by our own vices, and has afforded us the advice, inſtructions, and examples of others, to deter or extricate us from theſe calamities. He has formed us ſubject to innumerable diſeaſes, and he has beſtowed on us a variety of remedies. He has made us liable to hunger, thirſt, and nakedneſs, and he ſupplies us with food, drink, and clothing, uſually by the adminiſtration of others. He has created poiſons, and he has provided antidotes. He has ordained the winter's cold to cure the peſtilential heat of the ſummer, and the ſummer's ſunſhine to dry up the inundations of the winter. Why the conſtitution of nature is ſo formed, why all the viſible diſpenſations of Providence are ſuch, and why ſuch is the Chriſtian diſpenſation alſo, we know not, nor have faculties to comprehend. God might certainly have made the material world a ſyſtem of perfect beauty and regularity, without evils, and without remedies; and the Chriſtian diſpenſation a ſcheme only of moral virtue, productive of happineſs, without the intervention of any atonement or mediation. He might have exempted our bodies from all diſeaſes, and our minds from all depravity, and we ſhould then have ſtood in no need of medicines to reſtore us to health, or expedients to reconcile us to his favour. It ſeems indeed to

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our ignorance, that this would have been more conſiſtent with juſtice and reaſon; but his infinite wiſdom has decided in another manner, and formed the ſyſtems both of Nature and Chriſtianity on other principles; and theſe ſo exactly ſimilar, that we have cauſe to conclude that they both muſt proceed from the ſame ſource of divine power and wiſdom, however inconſiſtent with our reaſon they may appear. Reaſon is undoubtedly our ſureſt guide in all matters, which lie within the narrow circle of her intelligence: On the ſubject of revelation her province is only to examine into its authority; and when that is once proved, ſhe has no more to do, but to acquieſce in its doctrines; and therefore is never ſo ill employed, as when ſhe pretends to accommodate them to her own ideas of rectitude and truth. God, ſays this ſelf-ſufficient teacher, is perfectly wiſe, juſt, and good; and what is the inference? That all his diſpenſations muſt be conformable to our notions of perfect wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs: but it ſhould firſt be proved, that man is as perfect, and as wiſe as his Creator, or this conſequence will by no means follow; but rather the reverſe, that is, that the diſpenſations of a perfect, and all-wiſe Being muſt probably appear unreaſonable, and perhaps unjuſt, to a Being imperfect and ignorant; and therefore their ſeeming impoſſibility may be a mark of their truth, and in ſome meaſure juſtify that pious

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rant of a mad enthuſiaſt, " Credo, quia im-
" poſſibile." Nor is it the leaſt ſurpriſing, that we are not able to underſtand the ſpiritual diſpenſations of the Almighty, when his material works are to us no leſs incomprehenſible; our reaſon can afford us no inſight into theſe great properties of matter, gravitation, attraction, elaſticity, and electricity, nor even into the eſſence of matter itſelf: Can reaſon teach us how the ſun's luminous orb can fill a circle, whoſe diameter contains many millions of miles, with a conſtant inundation of ſucceſſive rays, during thouſands of years, without any perceiveable diminution of that body, from whence they are continually poured, or any augmentation of thoſe bodies on which they fall, and by which they are conſtantly abſorbed? Can reaſon tell us how thoſe rays, darted with a velocity greater than that of a cannon-ball, can ſtrike the tendereſt organs of the human frame without inflicting any degree of pain, or by what means this percuſſion only can convey the forms of diſtant objects to an immaterial mind? or how any union can be formed between material and immaterial eſſences; or how the wounds of the body can give pain to the ſoul, or the anxiety of the ſoul can emaciate and deſtroy the body? That all theſe things are ſo, we have viſible and indiſputable demonſtration; but how they can be ſo, is to us as incomprehenſible, as the moſt abſtruſe myſteries of revelation

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can poſſibly be. In ſhort, we ſee ſo ſmall a part of the great whole; we know ſo little of the relation, which the preſent life bears to pre-exiſtent and future ſtates; we can conceive ſo little of the nature of God, and his attributes, or mode of exiſtence; we can comprehend ſo little of the material, and ſo much leſs of the moral plan on which the univerſe is conſtituted, or on what principle it proceeds, that, if a revelation from ſuch a being, on ſuch ſubjects, was in every part familiar to our underſtandings, and conſonant to our reaſon, we ſhould have great cauſe to ſuſpect its divine authority; and therefore, had this revelation been leſs incomprehenſible, it would certainly have been more incredible.

But I ſhall not enter further into the conſideration of theſe abſtruſe and difficult ſpeculations, becauſe the diſcuſſion of them would render this ſhort eſſay too tedious and laborious a taſk for the peruſal of them, for whom it was principally intended; which are all thoſe buſy or idle perſons, whoſe time and thoughts are wholly engroſſed by the purſuits of buſineſs or pleaſure, ambition or luxury, who know nothing of this religion, except what they have accidentally picked up by deſultory converſation or ſuperficial reading, and have thence determined with themſelves, that a pretended revelation, founded on ſo ſtrange and improbable a ſtory, ſo contradictory to reaſon, ſo adverſe to the

the world and all its occupations, ſo incredible in its doctrines, and in its precepts ſo impracticable, can be nothing more than the impoſition of prieſtcraft upon ignorant and illiterate ages, and artfully continued as an engine well adapted to awe and govern the ſuperſtitious vulgar. To talk to ſuch about the Chriſtian religion, is to converſe with the deaf concerning muſic, or with the blind on the beauties of painting: they want all ideas relative to the ſubject, and therefore can never be made to comprehend it: to enable them to do this, their minds muſt be formed for theſe conceptions by contemplation, retirement, and abſtraction from buſineſs and diſſipation; by ill-health, diſappointments, and diſtreſſes; and poſſibly by divine interpoſition, or by enthuſiaſm, which is uſually miſtaken for it. Without ſome of theſe preparatory aids, together with a competent degree of learning and application, it is impoſſible that they can think or know, underſtand or believe, any thing about it. If they profeſs to believe, they deceive others; if they fancy that they believe, they deceive themſelves. I am ready to acknowledge, that theſe gentlemen, as far as their information reaches, are perfectly in the right; and if they are endued with good underſtandings, which have been intirely devoted to the buſineſs or amuſements of the world, they can paſs no other judgment, and muſt revolt from the hiſtory and doctrines of this religion.

religion. " The preaching Chriſt crucified " was to the Jews a ſtumbling block, and " to the Greeks fooliſhneſs *;" and ſo it muſt appear to all, who, like them, judge from eſtabliſhed prejudices, falſe learning, and ſuperficial knowledge; for thoſe who are quite unable to follow the chain of its prophecy, to ſee the beauty and juſtneſs of its moral precepts, and to enter into the wonders of its diſpenſations, can form no other idea of this revelation, but that of a confuſed rhapſody of fictions and abſurdities.

If it is aſked, Was Chriſtianity then intended only for learned divines and profound philoſophers? I anſwer, No: it was at firſt preached by the illiterate, and received by the ignorant; and to ſuch are the practical, which are the moſt neceſſary parts of it, ſufficiently intelligible: but the proofs of its authority undoubtedly are not, becauſe theſe muſt be chiefly drawn from other parts, of a ſpeculative nature, opening to our inquiries inexhauſtible diſcoveries concerning the nature, attributes, and diſpenſations of God, which cannot be underſtood without ſome learning and much attention. From theſe the generality of mankind muſt neceſſarily be excluded, and muſt therefore truſt to others for the grounds of their belief, if they believe at all. And hence perhaps it is, that faith, or eaſineſs of belief, is ſo frequently

* 1 Cor. i. 26.

and

and ſo ſtrongly recommended in the goſpel; becauſe if men require proofs, of which they themſelves are incapable, and thoſe who have no knowledge on this important ſubject will not place ſome confidence in thoſe who have; the illiterate and unattentive muſt ever continue in a ſtate of unbelief: but then all ſuch ſhould remember, that in all ſciences, even in mathematics themſelves, there are many propoſitions, which on a curſory view appear to the moſt acute underſtandings, uninſtructed in that ſcience, to be impoſſible to be true, which yet on a cloſer examination are found to be truths capable of the ſtricteſt demonſtration; and that therefore, in diſquiſitions on which we cannot determine without much learned inveſtigation, reaſon uninformed is by no means to be depended on; and from hence they ought ſurely to conclude, that it may be at leaſt as poſſible for them to be miſtaken in diſbelieving this revelation, who know nothing of the matter, as for thoſe great maſters of reaſon and erudition, Grotius, Bacon, Newton, Boyle, Locke, Addiſon, and Lyttelton, to be deceived in their belief: a belief, to which they firmly adhered after the moſt diligent and learned reſearches into the authenticity of its records, the completion of the prophecies, the ſublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, and the arguments of its adverſaries; a belief, which they have teſtified to the world by their writings, without any other

other motive, than their regard for truth and the benefit of mankind. Should the few foregoing pages add but one mite to the treaſures with which theſe learned writers have enriched the world; if they ſhould be ſo fortunate as to perſuade any of theſe minute philoſophers to place ſome confidence in theſe great opinions, and to diſtruſt their own; if they ſhould be able to convince them, that notwithſtanding all unfavourable appearances, Chriſtianity may not be altogether artifice and error; if they ſhould prevail on them to examine it with ſome attention, or, if that is too much trouble, not to reject it without any examination at all; the purpoſe of this little work will be ſufficiently anſwered. Had the arguments herein uſed, and the new hints here flung out, been more largely diſcuſſed, it might eaſily have been extended to a more conſiderable bulk; but then the buſy would not have had leiſure, nor the idle inclination to have read it. Should it ever have the honour to be admitted into ſuch good company, they will immediately, I know, determine, that it muſt be the work of ſome enthuſiaſt or methodiſt, ſome beggar, or ſome madman. I ſhall therefore beg leave to aſſure them, that the author is very far removed from all theſe characters: that he once perhaps believed as little as themſelves; but having ſome leiſure and more curioſity, he employed them both in reſolving a queſtion which

which ſeemed to him of ſome importance —Whether Chriſtianity was really an impoſture founded on an abſurd, incredible, and obſolete fable, as many ſuppoſe it? Or whether it is, what it pretends to be, a revelation communicated to mankind by the interpoſition of ſupernatural power? On a candid enquiry, he ſoon found, that the firſt was an abſolute impoſſibility, and that its pretenſions to the latter were founded on the moſt ſolid grounds; in the further purſuit of his examination, he perceived, at every ſtep, new lights ariſing, and ſome of the brighteſt from parts of it the moſt obſcure, but productive of the cleareſt proofs, becauſe equally beyond the power of human artifice to invent, and human reaſon to diſcover. Theſe arguments, which have convinced him of the divine origin of this religion, he has here put together in as clear and conciſe a manner as he was able, thinking they might have the ſame effect upon others, and being of opinion, that if there were a few more true Chriſtians in the world, it would be beneficial to themſelves, and by no means detrimental to the public.

SHORT

SHORT AND CURSORY

OBSERVATIONS

ON

SEVERAL PASSAGES

IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT.

MATT. v. 3.

Μακαριοι οι πτωχοι τῳ πνευματι, ὁτι αὐτων ἐστιν ἡ βασιλεια τῶν οὐρανων.

Bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

IN this declaration of Chriſt, two queſtions offer themſelves to our conſideration: 1ſt, Who are the poor in ſpirit?—And 2d, What is the kingdom of heaven?

By the poor in ſpirit are here meant, thoſe who, by their natural diſpoſitions, are meek, quiet, teachable, and ſubmiſſive; or thoſe who, by reflection and cultivation, have rendered their diſpoſitions ſuch, and have eradicated from their hearts pride, envy, and ambition, thoſe high-ſpirited paſſions, ſo deſtructive

deſtructive of the happineſs of ſociety, as well as of their own. What portion of mankind comes under this deſcription is known only to the ſearcher of all hearts; but we may reaſonably conclude, that neither heroes, conquerors, or any of thoſe whom the world dignifies with the titles of great men, can be of the number.

By the kingdom of heaven is here to be underſtood, that celeſtial community of the ſpirits* of juſt men made perfect, over which God more immediately preſides, and which is therefore ſometimes called the kingdom of God; in which there are no wars, factions, ſtruggles, or contentions, but all is benevolence, peace, concord, or ſubordination: a kingdom frequently hung out to our view in the New Teſtament, of which we are promiſed to be made ſubjects in a future life, provided we ſhall be properly qualified for it by our behaviour in the preſent.

To ſelect the moſt excellent of mankind, and to qualify them for admiſſion into this holy and happy ſociety, ſeems to be the chief object of the Chriſtian diſpenſation. What that qualification muſt be, we are ſufficiently informed by the author of it—Calling to him little children, he ſays, "Of "ſuch is the kingdom of God;" and again, "Verily I ſay unto you, Whoſoever ſhall not "receive the kingdom of God as a little child,

* Heb. xii. 23.

"he

" he ſhall not enter therein *." It is alſo evident from the nature of this community, that none but the poor in ſpirit can be admitted; becauſe, were the proud, factious, turbulent, and ambitious to find entrance, they would immediately deſtroy that tranquillity and happineſs with which it is bleſſed; and this kingdom, though not of this world, would ſoon become exactly ſimilar to thoſe which are.

It is ſaid, " Many are called, but few are " choſen;" but we are not therefore to conclude, that all who are not choſen are to be conſigned to a ſtate of miſery; many who are deficient in this neceſſary qualification, and therefore inadmiſſible into this ſtate of purity and perfection, may deſerve no greater puniſhment than the loſs of ſo ineſtimable an acquiſition; and ſome perhaps may have virtues which may entitle them to rewards of an inferior kind. Mankind are by no means diviſible into two claſſes only—the righteous and the wicked. We find them indeed ſo divided in many paſſages of the New Teſtament, all which muſt be underſtood but as general declarations, that the righteous ſhall be rewarded, and the wicked puniſhed, in a future life; but cannot be applied to individuals, becauſe in fact no ſuch line of diſtinction can be drawn between them. The generality of mankind are compleatly nei-

* Mark x. 14, 15.

ther the one or the other: none are so good as to be guilty of no crimes, and few so bad as to be possessed of no virtues; and in most men they are intermixed, though in very different proportions. The justice of Providence must have prepared many intermediate states of happiness and misery, in which every individual will receive reward or punishment in exact proportion to his merits. Astronomy has opened to our view innumerable worlds, some of which are probably happier, and some more miserable than this which we at present inhabit; in them there is ample room for the display of the divine justice and benevolence, as in some of them such a situation may be allotted to every one as his conduct has deserved.

MATT. v. 5.

Μακαριοι οι πραεις, οτι αυτοι κληρονομησουσι την γην.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

IT appears by no means easy to reconcile the promise with facts and experience; for earthly prosperity, wealth, power, and pre-eminence, are so far from being the inheritance of the meek, that they seem to be entirely monopolized by the bold, turbulent, and ambitious; and we may say with Cato, This world was made for Cæsar.

To

To extricate themſelves from this difficulty, ſome commentators have been induced to look out for another earth, which they at laſt fortunately found in the words of St. Peter; who ſays, "Nevertheleſs we, according to promiſe, look for new heavens "and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteouſneſs*." To this new earth, they would perſuade us, this promiſe may with propriety be applied, and that therein it will certainly be fulfilled.

But in explaining this paſſage, there is no occaſion to have recourſe to ſo far-fetched and fanciful an interpretation, nor to call in the aſſiſtance of a new world. By the meek inheriting the earth, nothing more is meant, than that perſons of meek, quiet, and peaceable diſpoſitions, enjoy more happineſs on earth, and ſuffer leſs diſquietude in the preſent life, than thoſe of oppoſite characters; and this is verified by the experience of every day; they acquire more friends, and fewer enemies, they meet with fewer injuries and diſappointments, and bear thoſe which they cannot avoid with leſs uneaſineſs, and paſs through the world as they do through a crowd, leſs obſtructed, leſs bruiſed and joſtled, than thoſe who force their way by violence and impetuoſity. To which we may add, that a meek and quiet temper is the moſt efficacious preſervative of health, the firſt of all

* 2 Pet. iii. 13.

earthly bleſſings, and without which we are incapable of enjoying any other. Wealth, power, and grandeur, are by no means eſſential to earthly happineſs; but ſhould we admit that they are, and are included in this promiſe, we ſhould not find it altogether unfulfilled; for, though the turbulent and overbearing may ſometimes ſeize on them by violence, they much oftener fail in their attempts, and ſink by their own inſolence into ruin and contempt; whilſt thoſe of eaſy and conciliating manners, ſilently climb above them, leſs envied, and leſs oppoſed, becauſe leſs noticed and leſs offending.

It is univerſally allowed, that nothing ſo much advances our worldly intereſts, and ſo much aſſiſts us in our purſuits of wealth and honours, as good-breeding; and what is good-breeding, but an affectation of meekneſs, humility, and complacency? if, therefore, the pretence to theſe amiable qualities can do ſo much, ſurely the poſſeſſion of them will do a great deal more. In fact it does, and ſeldom fails to gain us favour, increaſe our friends, and advance our intereſts.—Thus we ſee this promiſe is generally accompliſhed; the meek do inherit the earth, that is, have the beſt chance of acquiring and enjoying the bleſſings of this life, as well as the happineſs of another.

MATT.

MATT. v. 7.

Μακαριοι οι ἐλεημονες, ὁτι αὐτοι ἐλεηθησονται.

Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy.

CRUELTY is the moſt unpardonable of all crimes, becauſe it is without temptation, and therefore without excuſe. Mercy is the moſt amiable attribute of God; and a virtue moſt becoming the ſituation of man, becauſe the ſins which he perpetually commits, and the dangers with which he is conſtantly ſurrounded, oblige him to ſtand in need of it every hour: it is peculiarly congenial to the benevolent ſpirit of the Chriſtian religion, and as ſuch is here enforced by the Author of it, in this ſhort but emphatical declaration; in which it is remarkable, that we find nothing which limits our exerciſe of this amiable virtue within any bounds, or confines it to any deſcription; not to our relations, our our friends, neighbours our countrymen, nor even to mankind: from whence we may reaſonably conclude, that he requires us to extend it to every thing that has life and ſenſibility. The words ſeem to regard more the diſpoſition of the actor than the object on which it is exerted: "Bleſſed are the merciful," that is, thoſe who are of a tender and compaſſionate temper, who feel for the miſeries of every thing that has life, and endeavour all in their power to relieve them. Whoever, therefore,

therefore, can wantonly inflict pain on the meaneſt animal, or receive a diabolical pleaſure from its ſufferings, can have no claim to this bleſſing, nor to obtain that mercy to which he is a ſtranger.

MATT. vi. 16.

Ὅταν δὲ νηστεύητε, μὴ γίνεσθε ὡσπερ οἱ ὑποκριται.

Moreover, when ye faſt, be not as the hypocrites.

JESUS Chriſt having been born and educated under the Jewiſh inſtitution, complied with all the ceremonies and cuſtoms of that law, and required none of his diſciples to relinquiſh them, in order to receive the religion which he came to teach. Among theſe, faſting at particular ſeaſons was one, which was commanded by their law, obſerved by all, and particularly by the Phariſees, with ſuperſtitious rigour and hypocritical oſtentation; which he here with ſome aſperity reprehends. He reproves them, not for faſting, the uſe of which, as well as that of all the reſt of their religious rites, he approved and encouraged; but it is obſervable, that in theſe words there is nothing which requires it; taking it for granted, that they would faſt in obedience to their law, he only ſays, "When ye faſt, be "not as the hypocrites;" and then proceeds

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to inſtruct them how to perform this duty in a proper manner: but does not command them to perform it at all.

This ſilence of their maſter, on a ſubject which they thought ſo important, induced many of the Jews, who had become his diſciples, to excuſe themſelves from complying with this unpleaſant ceremony; as is evident from the queſtion put to him by the diſciples of John the Baptiſt, who ſaid, "Why do we "and the Phariſees faſt often*, but thy diſ- "ciples faſt not?" From hence it appears plainly, that though Chriſt obſerved this, as well as all the ceremonies of the Moſaic law, it was no part of his inſtitution, nor was enjoined by him as a Chriſtian, or a moral duty. This indeed, and every other mode of ſelf-puniſhment, are ſo oppoſite to the benevolent ſpirit of the religion which he taught that, it is impoſſible they can make a part of it. Chriſtianity requires us to make every one as happy as we are able, to relieve the poor, viſit the ſick, and comfort the diſtreſſed; but if every man was obliged to inflict ſufferings upon himſelf, inſtead of excluding miſery at every avenue, as we are benevolently commanded, we ſhould introduce as much as if every man was permitted to injure and torment his neighbour. There are many precepts in the New Teſtament, which require us to ſuffer with fortitude and

* Matt. ix. 14.

reſignation,

reſignation, for righteouſneſs ſake, for truth, for our religion, or the benefit of mankind; but we find none which enjoin ſufferings for their own ſake, or repreſent them as meritorious in themſelves. St. Peter exhorts his diſciples to ſuffer patiently for theſe great ends, "becauſe Chriſt alſo ſuffered for them, "leaving us an example that we ſhould fol-"low his ſteps *;" but he does not adviſe us to ſuffer for no end at all.

Faſting, with all the reſt of their religious rites, are continued to the Jews after their converſion to Chriſtianity, but were never impoſed on the proſelytes of any other nation; from whence it is evident, that Chriſt never intended by the goſpel to aboliſh the Moſaic law, with regard to the Jews, nor to extend it to any other people. Hence ariſes that remarkable difference, which cannot eſcape our notice, between the religion of Chriſt and that of his Apoſtles, and particularly of St. Paul; a difference ſo great, that, if we attend not to the cauſe of it, we muſt conſider them as two religious inſtitutions contradictory to each other. Chriſt commands his diſciples to perform the moſt minute ceremonies of the Jewiſh law, to pay tithes even of mint, anniſeed, and cummin †; St. Paul repreſents the moſt important, as uſeleſs and inſignificant, and ſays, "Circum-"ciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is no-

* 1 Pet. ii. 21. † Matt. xxiii. 23.

"thing,

" thing, but the keeping the commandments " of God †." The cauſe is ſufficiently evident: Chriſt preached to the Jews, and therefore his religion is founded on and incorporated with theirs, which he did not require them to relinquiſh, in order to accept it, and aſſures them, that he did not come " to deſtroy their law, but to fulfil it." St. Paul preached chiefly to the Gentiles, but was not commiſſioned to convert them to Judaiſm, in order to their becoming Chriſtians; and therefore we do not find that he, or any of the Apoſtles, impoſed the obſervance of faſts, or any other ceremonials of the Moſaic law, on their Gentile proſelytes.

MATT. x. 29.

Οὐχὶ δυο στρουθια ἀσσαρίου πωλειται. και ἐν ἐξ αὐτων οὐ πεσειται ἐπι την γην, ἀνευ του πατρος ὑμων.

Are not two ſparrows ſold for a farthing? And one of theſe ſhall not fall to the ground without your heavenly Father.

MANY have been the controverſies amongſt philoſophers, in all times, concerning a general and a particular Providence. Some have been of opinion, that the great Creator of all things ſo framed the univerſal ſyſtem, that every part of it is carried on by

† 1 Cor. vii. 19.

a regular

a regular proceſs of cauſes and conſequences, without his farther interpoſition; and that he cannot interpoſe, without changing the courſe of nature by a miraculous act of divine power, which he rarely, if ever, thinks proper to exert: that both the material and moral world are governed by general laws, which cannot be ſuſpended for the ſake of individuals, who muſt therefore ſubmit to this neceſſity, though rewards and puniſhments are not always diſtributed in the preſent life in proportion to their merits; and that a machine ſo conſtituted is a more conſpicuous inſtance of infinite wiſdom and power, than the one which ſtands in need of the continual interference of its author, for regulation and ſupport.—Others have thought, that God not only created the world, but perpetually ſuſtains, invigorates, and directs every part of it; and that, if this energy of divine power was withdrawn but for a moment, the whole would inſtantly be annihilated.—The latter is undoubtedly the truth, and is confirmed by reaſon, ſcripture, and experience. Reaſon teaches us that the revolutions of the vaſt and innumerable celeſtial orbs, through immenſe ſpaces, or the delicate movements in animal and vegetable bodies, can never poſſibly be performed by any principles originally impreſſed on matter by attraction, cohesion, elaſticity, or electricity; becauſe they act in contradiction to them all: and therefore they muſt be effect-

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ed by the continual direction of ſome omnipotent hand: it aſſures us, that the moral, as well as the material world, muſt be under the continual influence of the ſame power; becauſe, without it, the great deſigns of Providence could never be accompliſhed. The moſt important events in life are derived from the operations of matter and will, peace and war, plenty and famine, our health and diſeaſes, our happineſs and miſery, our ſafety and deſtruction. No plan, therefore, could be purſued, if theſe were all left to the blind movement of the one, or the capricious elections of the other; but happily for us, they are both under the controul of an omniſcient and omnipotent governor, who diſpenſes them as ſeems beſt to his infinite wiſdom; and this he can do by a perpetual though inviſible influence, without the expence of any miracle; for, if his interference in any event conſtitutes a miracle, every event is a miracle in nature, becauſe there can be no event without it.

The whole tenour of the ſcriptures implies the conſtant ſuperintendency of the Creator over all his works, his continual attention to the moſt inconſiderable, as well as to the moſt important events, to the fall of a ſparrow and to the fall of an empire, to ourſelves, our behaviour, our happineſs and ſufferings, our enjoyments, and our wants; theſe are all repreſented as the effects of his will, and therefore the objects of his knowledge and

his

his care; and on this principle we are every where enjoined to love him, to fear him, to praiſe him, to adore him, to obey his commands, to implore his forgiveneſs, to thank him for his mercy, and to deprecate his wrath.

Experience teaches us the ſame leſſon; and a man muſt be poſſeſſed of very little obſervation, and leſs faith, who does not recollect daily inſtances of the apparent interpoſition of Providence in the detection of crimes, the puniſhment of guilt, and the protection of innocence, which fall within the circle of his own knowledge, and are recorded in the moſt authentic hiſtories of all ages.

MATT. X. 34, 35.

Μη νομισητε ὁτι ἠλθον βαλειν ἐιρηνην ἐπι την γην· ὀυκ ἠλθον βαλειν ἐιρηνην, ἀλλα μαχαιραν.

Ἠλθον γαρ διχασαι ἀνθρωπον κατα τȣ πατρος ἀυτȣ, και θυγατερα κατα της μητρος ἀυτης, και νυμφην κατα της πενθερας αυτης.

Think not that I am to come to ſend peace on earth; I came not to ſend peace, but a ſword.

For I am come to ſet a man at variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in-law.

THIS prophecy of Chriſt was ſoon compleated and dreadfully fulfilled, particularly in that city, and amongſt that people to whom it was ſpoken; for the Jews were ſo far

far from accepting that pacific and benevolent religion which he taught, that they perverted it into a new cauſe of increaſing thoſe national contentions and private animoſities in which they were then univerſally involved, and were juſtly puniſhed for their enormous wickedneſs, obſtinacy, and incredulity, by the ſwords of their enemies and their own, with ſuch calamities as are unexampled in the hiſtory of mankind. This is an undiſputed fact; but how is it reconcileable with his frequent declarations on other occaſions, and the whole tenour of the New Teſtament, in which Chriſt every where is ſtyled the Prince of Peace, and his Goſpel repreſented as introductive of peace and good-will towards men?

The uſual ſolution of this difficulty is this; that ſuch it was intended to be by its benevolent author, but that it was ſo far perverted by the wickedneſs of man, that the effects of it proved to be the very reverſe of its original deſign, and it became productive of all the evils which it was intended to prevent.—But this, I think, is by no means ſatisfactory; becauſe I cannot be perſuaded that the wiſe and beneficent intentions of Providence can ever be defeated by the folly and wickedneſs of man; their effects, indeed, may ſometimes be delayed by events, which to us may ſeem adverſe, but which, in fact, are neceſſary to their final completion; and this, in the preſent inſtance, I take to be the caſe.

caſe. The great end of Chriſt's coming was to ſend peace and good-will amongſt men; and this it has undoubtedly effected to a certain degree: his mild and pacific religion has much abated their native ferocity, cruelty, and depravity, and is making a daily progreſs in this ſalutary work; but he found it neceſſary to ſend with it a ſword, to lop off ſome part of that enormous wickedneſs, which, at its firſt appearance, had overſpread the world, and to make men by their ſufferings capable of its reception; as ſome inveterate diſeaſes will admit of no remedy without a ſevere and painful amputation.

This prophecy of Chriſt, therefore, is not in the leaſt contradictory to his own declarations, or the ſenſe of the ſcriptures, becauſe they relate to different objects; the firſt foretells the many miſeries which he foreſaw men would bring upon themſelves, by the abuſe and perverſion of the religion which he taught them; the latter informs us of the pacific ſpirit and benevolent deſign of that religion, and the ſalutary effects which it muſt ultimately produce on the morals and happineſs of mankind.

MATT. x. 41.

Ὁ δεχόμενος προφήτην εἰς ὄνομα προφήτου μισθὸν προφήτου λήψεται.

He that receiveth a prophet, in the name of a prophet, ſhall receive a prophet's reward.

BY "a prophet" is here to be underſtood, a holy, religious, and good man; and the meaning of the whole ſentence is this:—"He "that receiveth a prophet," that is, he that entertains, aſſiſts, and patroniſes a religious and good man; "in the name of a prophet," that is, becauſe he is, and has the name and character of a religious and good man; "ſhall receive a prophet's reward;" that is, is entitled to, and ſhall receive as great a reward as the religious and good man himſelf. That he ſhould receive an equal reward is perfectly agreeable to divine juſtice, becauſe, entertaining and patroniſing a pious and virtuous man, from the ſole conſideration of his merit, demonſtrates a heart as much devoted to piety and virtue as any action which the worthy object of his favour can poſſibly perform.

If this is true, the converſe muſt be true likewiſe; that is, that he that entertains, protects, and patroniſes an impious, a profligate man, for the ſake of his vices, is as criminal, and ſhall receive as ſevere a puniſhment, as the moſt abandoned of his favourites: and this with equal juſtice, becauſe

cauſe the approbation of wickedneſs in others, having no temptation for an excuſe, is more atrocious, and demonſtrates a more depraved diſpoſition, than even the practice of it. The ſeduction of pleaſure, the lure of intereſt, or the violence of our paſſions, may be ſome, though a poor apology, for the commiſſion of crimes; but to ſit coolly by and view with pleaſure the iniquities and profligacy of others, and to encourage them by our favour, approbation, and rewards, indicates a diſpoſition more compleatly depraved than the commiſſion of them, but depraved as it is, we ſee inſtances of it every day; we ſee the moſt impious and profane, the moſt corrupt and diſſolute, ſometimes the idols of the vulgar, and more frequently the idols of the great; we ſee them, without any introduction or recommendation, except their vices, entertained, careſſed, and patroniſed by the rich and powerful, who look with envy and admiration on a degree of profligacy in them, which they themſelves are unable to arrive at.

MATT. xi. 25.

Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, εἶπεν· Ἐξομολογοῦμαί σοι πάτερ, κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἀπέκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν, καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις.

Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

IT seems not a little extraordinary, that Jesus should, in this solemn manner, return thanks to his heavenly Father, for having hid from the wise and prudent the mysteries of that gospel, which he himself came into the world to promulgate, on the knowledge of which the salvation of mankind depended; but this may be very well accounted for by a proper explanation of these words.

By the "wise," I apprehend, are to be here understood, those self-sufficient reasoners who will believe no divine revelation which does not exactly tally with their own imperfect ideas of truth, nor obey any precepts which are not conformable to their notions of justice and the fitness of things. By the "prudent," are meant those, who pay little attention to any religion, but are perpetually employed in worldly occupations, and the pursuits of interest and ambition. Jesus, having experienced the obstinacy and perverseness, with which persons under both these descriptions rejected the revelation

which he offered them, and at the ſame time the readineſs with which it was thankfully received by the meek, the humble, the teachable, and the innocent, returns thanks to his heavenly Father, (that is, in the form of an addreſs, adores and admires the wiſdom and juſtice of God), for having ſo contrived the nature of the Goſpel, that it was leſs acceptable, and leſs intelligible to thoſe who, from their evil diſpoſitions, deſerved not to partake of the benefits which it confers, than to thoſe who are more worthy to receive them: and this ſeems to be nothing more than what, we all do, or ought to do, which is, to thank, admire, and adore our gracious Creator, for having ſo conſtituted the eſſence of all human vices and virtues, that each are naturally productive of their own puniſhments and rewards.

MATT. xvi. 18.

Και ἐπι ταυτῃ τῃ πετρᾳ οἰκοδομησω μου την ἐκκλησιαν.

Upon this rock will I build my church.

FROM this declaration of Chriſt it plainly appears, that he intended to be the founder of a church, that is, a ſociety of perſons believing his divine miſſion, and openly profeſſing the religion which he came to publiſh to mankind; which ſociety ſhould be veſted with the powers and privileges of a corporate

rate body, and exerciſe them under his protection to the end of the world; but we do not find that, by any precepts delivered during his life, or any inſtructions left behind him at his death, he ever communicated to his diſciples any plan of the formation of this church, or any rules for the government of it when formed. The reaſon of which I take to be this:—He knew the adminiſtration of this government muſt fall into the hands of men, be blended with their worldly intereſts, and in conſequence be ſoon corrupted and abuſed, and therefore unworthy of divine authority; and that, if he appointed any particular form, or ſpecific regulations for the management of it, he muſt have given ſome degree of ſanction to thoſe future corruptions and abuſes. He knew, likewiſe, that it was unneceſſary; becauſe a community, once eſtabliſhed, muſt naturally produce rule and ſubordination, that is, a government, becauſe it cannot ſubſiſt without one. He inſtituted a church, becauſe, without ſome inſtitution of that kind, his religion muſt quickly have been baniſhed from the world, and known no where but in the cloſets of a few ſpeculative philoſophers, and therefore had little influence on the general conduct of mankind; but he choſe rather to truſt the form and regulations of it to the nature of man, and the nature of government, than to any poſitive command. He did not ordain that when his religion ſhould have ſpread over every quarter of the globe, this church

ſhould become equally extenſive, and be governed by one ſupreme head his ſucceſſor and repreſentative. He did not command, that in every reſpective country this church ſhould be placed under the dominion of biſhops or preſbyters, of councils, convocations, or ſynods. He has preſcribed no forms of worſhip, except one ſhort prayer; no particular habits for the miniſters who officiate; no places ſet apart for the performance of religious duties, or decorations for thoſe places to excite reverence and devotion in the performers. All theſe he has left to the deciſion of future ages, to be ordered by different communities, in different countries, in a manner that ſhall beſt ſuit the tempers of the people, the genius of their government, and the opinions of the times; provided nothing is introduced inconſiſtent with the purity of his original inſtitution. From hence evidently appears the ignorance and abſurdity of thoſe who reject all eccleſiaſtical authority as human impoſitions, and deny the very exiſtence of any Chriſtian church, in contradiction to the expreſs declarations of its founder; and not leſs of thoſe who refuſe compliance with any national religious eſtabliſhment, becauſe they cannot find the form and ceremonies of it exactly delineated and preſcribed in any part of the New Teſtament.

Chriſt has inſtituted eccleſiaſtical, in the ſame manner that God has civil, govern-

ment,

ment, that is, by making it neceſſary, without directing the mode of its adminiſtration; becauſe, though the thing itſelf is neceſſary, the mode is not ſo.

MATT. xix. 4, 5.

Ὁ δε ἀποκριθεις, ειπεν αὐτοις· Οὐκ ἀνεγνωτε, ὁτι ὁ ποιησας ἀπ' ἀρχης, ἀρσεν και θηλυ εποιησεν αυτους;

Και ειπεν· Ἑνεκεν τουτου καταλειψει ἀνθρωπος τον πατερα και την μητερα, και προσκολληθησεται τῃ γυναικι αὐτου, και ἐσονται οἱ δυο εις σαρκα μιαν.

And he anſwered and ſaid, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female;

And ſaid, For this cauſe ſhall a man leave father and mother, and ſhall cleave to his wife: and they twain ſhall be one fleſh?

SHOULD there be any controverſy concerning the lawfulneſs of polygamy under the Chriſtian diſpenſation, this declaration of its author is ſurely ſufficiently deciſive in the negative, becauſe, if a man and a woman, by marriage, become one fleſh, it ſeems impoſſible that a greater number than two ſhould be incorporated by that union; and, if a man is commanded to leave his father and mother, and cleave to one wife, he is ſurely not at liberty to cleave to another.

The queſtion here put to Jeſus was not, indeed, concerning polygamy, but divorce; but his anſwer comprehended them both, and declares, by the cleareſt implication, that

that the firſt ought not to be permitted, and, in expreſs words, that the laſt is abſolutely unlawful in all caſes, except in that of adultery.

The advocates for polygamy alledge, That the practice of it is recorded as far back as hiſtory carries us, to the earlieſt ages of the world; that it was allowed during the whole period of the Jewiſh theocracy, and continued by that people till the coming of Chriſt, and then not prohibited by any poſitive command: and that, therefore, though from a change of circumſtances in the preſent times it may not be expedient, it cannot certainly be unlawful.——This argument has ſurely much weight; but in anſwer it may be ſaid, That, although we do not find it any where in the New Teſtament abſolutely forbid, it is, in this and ſeveral other places, highly diſapproved of by the cleareſt implications; and indeed it is by no means credible, that a cuſtom ſo licentious, ſo injurious to one, and ſo deſtructive to the domeſtic happineſs of both ſexes; a cuſtom, even at that time, rejected by almoſt all the Gentile nations; ſhould be adopted or permitted under the purity of the Chriſtian inſtitution.

The true ſtate of the caſe I take to be this: —Multitudes of the Jews, unable to reſiſt the preaching of Chriſt, and the evidence of his divine miſſion enforced by ſo many miracles, every day became converts to his religion; but, being extremely fond of the ceremonies

remonies and cuſtoms of their own, could not ſuddenly be prevailed on to relinquiſh them. Of none were they more tenacious than of this of polygamy, in which they and their forefathers had been indulged for ſo many centuries, and which had been authoriſed by the example of characters, to whom they looked up with the moſt profound veneration; and therefore many of them, after their converſion, continued in the practice of it.

That they did ſo, ſeems to be confirmed by what St. Paul writes to Titus, that "a "biſhop muſt be blameleſs, the huſband of "one wife;" that is, that although polygamy might be overlooked in ſome of the Jewiſh converts, who could not be prevailed on to accept Chriſtianity on any other terms, it could not be ſuffered in any one who undertook ſo important and ſo ſacred an office as that of a biſhop; whoſe life ought to be exemplary, and his conduct free even from the imputation of all blame.—From hence it appears evident, that polygamy was always conſidered, by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, as incompatible with the religion which they taught; and that, although it might be tolerated in ſome of the Jewiſh proſelytes, who had immemorial cuſtom to plead in its behalf, yet, even in them, it was looked upon as extremely blameable, and was never claimed by or permitted to any of the Gentiles who were converted.

MATT.

MATT. xx. 15, 16.

Ἢ οὐκ ἔξεστί μοι ποιῆσαι ὃ θέλω ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς; ἢ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρός ἐστιν, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἀγαθός εἰμι;
Οὕτως ἔσονται οἱ ἔσχατοι, πρῶτοι, καὶ οἱ πρῶτοι, ἔσχατοι.

Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, becauſe I am good?
So the laſt ſhall be firſt, and the firſt laſt.

IN order to underſtand this parable of the houſeholder, who paid his labourers not in proportion to the time in which they worked, or the work which they had performed, but according to his own pleaſure; it is neceſſary to remember to whom, and on what occaſion it was ſpoken. Jeſus had juſt before declared, that when he ſhould ſit on his throne of glory, his twelve Apoſtles ſhould ſit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Iſrael. Many of his auditors, who had but lately ſeen theſe men employed in the loweſt occupations, and by no means eminent for their virtues or abilities, thought this a very partial declaration, and this promiſed exaltation far ſuperior to their merits. To theſe this parable was particularly addreſſed; intended to teach them, that all power, glory, and happineſs, are the ſole property of God, and that he alone has a right to diſpoſe of them according to his pleaſure; that all which we enjoy is a free gift from his benevolence, and not a compenſation for our merits; that our merits,

rits, if we have any, are derived from him; that even theſe merits proceed from his grace, and the rewards of them from his bounty; that we ought to be thankful for the benefits we receive from his favour, and have no pretence to complain of his partiality, if we ſee greater conferred on thoſe who may appear to us to deſerve them leſs; that we are bad judges of the merits of others, and worſe of our own, and that therefore, in a future life, many who are now laſt in our eſtimation, will be firſt in happineſs and glory; and many whom we now admire for their virtues, and imagine will be firſt in that ſtate, will be the laſt, that is, leaſt meritorious in the ſight of their juſt and all-diſcerning judge. From whence we may learn, that it is the higheſt preſumption in us to circumſcribe the right of our Creator, in the diſtribution of his favours, by our imperfect notion of fitneſs and equity, to ſet bounds to the operations of any one of his attributes by confronting it with another, to limit his power by the effects of his mercy, or the effects of his mercy by thoſe of his juſtice. His attributes are all above our comprehenſion, and therefore we ought only to adore them in ſilence, and ſubmit to his deciſion with gratitude and reſignation.

MATT. xxii. 21.

Τοτε λεγει αὐτοις· Ἀποδοτε οὖν τα Καισαρος, Καισαρι· και τα του Θεου, τῳ Θεῳ.

Then ſaid he unto them, Render unto Cæſar the things which are Cæſar's; and unto God, the things which are God's.

IN order to enſnare Jeſus into offending either their own nation, or the Roman government, under which they were then ſubjected, the Jews ſaid unto him, "Tell us, "therefore, what thinkeſt thou, Is it law-"ful to give tribute unto Cæſar, or not?" A queſtion the moſt inſidious, and moſt dangerous to decide on, that art or malice could have contrived; becauſe, in the deciſion of it, the moſt important political rights were to be determined: Whether they, being a people choſen by God, could lawfully ſubmit to the government of any but God; or ſome one of their own nation, deputed by his immediate direction?—Whether conqueſt, which is but unjuſt, though ſucceſsful violence, can give a juſt right to govern?—Whether one nation can have a right to rule over, and conſequently to impoſe tribute on another?—And, Whether any ſovereign can lawfully compel ſubjects to pay taxes, without their own conſent? If Chriſt had thought it ever proper for him to give directions on political topics, he certainly would not have neglected this opportunity; but he now, and at

at all times, induſtriouſly avoided it, and ſaid, " Shew me the tribute money:" then replies to their queſtion, by aſking them another, " Whoſe is this image and ſuperſcrip-" tion?" They anſwered, " Cæſar's." Then ſaid he unto them, " Render, therefore, unto " Cæſar the things which are Cæſar's; and " unto God, the things which are God's."

Many opinions, by the ingenuity of commentators, have been extracted from theſe few words of Chriſt. Some have thought, that, by them, he intended to explode that favourite notion, that they could not be lawfully governed by any except God. Some have aſſerted, that, by here acknowledging the title of Cæſar, he had eſtabliſhed the right of all conquerors to rule over the people whom they had ſubdued. Others would perſuade us, that, by the things which are Cæſar's, are to be underſtood, taxes impoſed by the ſtate; and, by the things which are God's, the revenues of the church: and it is ſurpriſing, that no courtly divine has undertaken to prove, from this ſhort deciſion, that every ſovereign has a right to ſeize on all the money which bears his image and ſuperſcription. But certainly none of theſe fanciful conjectures have any foundation in theſe words of Chriſt; which are no more than an evaſive anſwer to an inſidious queſtion, and a declaration of what he takes every opportunity of declaring, That he did not come to decide political controverſies, to

ſettle

ſettle the rights of conquerors and the conquered, or of ſovereigns and ſubjects; and that the only inſtructions which he could give on that head were, to pay quietly tribute and ſubmiſſion to whatever government they lived under, without unneceſſary inquiries into the lawfulneſs of their claims; but to inquire diligently after the will of God, and pay the ſtricteſt obedience to it on every occaſion.

MATT. xxvi. 39.

Και προελθων μικρον, ἐπεσεν ἐπι προσωπον αὐτυ, προσευχομενος, και λεγων, Πατερ μυ, ει δυνατον ἐστι, παρελθετω ἀπ' ἐμυ το ποτηριον τυτο.

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and praying, ſaying, O my Father, if it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from me.

THE hypothetical words, inſerted in this fervent addreſs of Chriſt to his heavenly Father, ſeem to eſtabliſh the truth of two important propoſitions: Firſt, That there may be, and actually are, evils inherent in the nature of things, which even Omnipotence cannot prevent; and, that we have reaſon to conclude, that all which we ſuffer in this life, except ſuch as we bring upon ourſelves by our miſconduct or mutual injuries, are of this kind; that is, ſuch as cannot be prevented without the admiſſion of greater evils, or

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the loſs of good more than equivalent; becauſe we cannot ſuppoſe that a Creator of infinite power and goodneſs, would admit any others into any part of his works.

The ſecond propoſition is, That the ſufferings and death of Chriſt are likewiſe of this kind, abſolutely neceſſary as an atonement for the ſins of mankind, and therefore unpreventable by any power, without defeating the great deſign of the benevolent but dreadful taſk which he had undertaken. As ſuch they are repreſented, by himſelf and his Apoſtles, through every part of the New Teſtament; not as contingencies, like thoſe of other martyrs in the cauſe of religion, but as an eſſential part of the original plan of his miſſion. From whence this neceſſity ariſes, we have not faculties to conceive: but it muſt be certainly from ſome connections between ſuffering and ſin, that is, between natural and moral evil, totally beyond the reach of our comprehenſions.

Chriſt, under the moſt terrible apprehenſions of his approaching execution, fell on his face, and prayed, ſaying, "O my Father, if "it be poſſible, let this cup paſs from me;" that is, if it be poſſible to procure the redemption of mankind without this ſacrifice: but it was not poſſible, and therefore he voluntarily ſubmitted to drink it, as the only means to accompliſh that benevolent end; and, in proof of it, ſays, "No man taketh

"my

" my life from me, but I lay it down of my-
" ſelf*." No doubt of its poſſibility could ariſe from any other cauſe, for ſurely it was not only poſſible, but very eaſy, for the power of God to have delivered him out of the hands of man. He might have changed the hearts of his enemies: he might have defeated their malice, by placing him in a ſituation beyond their reach, or by ſending twelve legions of angels to his aſſiſtance: " But how then ſhall the ſcriptures be ful-
" filled, that thus it muſt be †?" that is, How then ſhall the prophecies and promiſes be fulfilled, which aſſure us, that this important purpoſe can be effected by no other means, nor ſatisfaction made for the ſins of the world on any other terms?

MARK ii. 27.

Και ἐλεγεν αὐτοις· Το σαββαλον δια τον ἀνθρωπον ἐγενετο, ὀχ ὁ ἀνθρωπος δια το σαββαλον.

And he ſaid unto them, The ſabbath was made for man, and not man for the ſabbath.

THIS was the reply which Chriſt made to the Phariſees, who had frequently reproved him for healing the ſick on the ſabbath-day; and, in the preſent inſtance, for ſuffering his diſciples to pluck a few ears of corn as they walked through the fields on that day; by which we are to underſtand, that his opinion on this ſubject was, that the keeping

* John x. 18. † Matt. xxvi. 53.

holy

holy the ſabbath-day was a wiſe and excellent inſtitution, admirably contrived for the benefit of mankind, but not of ſuch indiſpenſable importance, that we ſhould think it is the chief duty of our lives, or that we were placed in this world on purpoſe to perform it.

The Phariſees were a ſect of the Jews, noted for their ſpiritual pride and hypocriſy, who pretended to extraordinary ſanctity, by a ſtrict and ſuperſtitious obſervance of every ceremony appointed by the Moſaic law, particularly that of keeping holy the ſabbath, with a rigour beyond what the good of ſociety would admit, or the inſtitution itſelf required; and it is not a little remarkable, that the ſectaries of all times have followed their example in this inſtance; they have all thought, or pretended to think, that a rigorous obſervance of this day is the firſt of all Chriſtian duties, and the neglect of it the moſt enormous of all crimes; whereas, properly ſpeaking, it is no Chriſtian duty at all, in any other ſenſe, than that it is the duty of every Chriſtian to comply with every inſtitution, from whatſoever ſource it may be derived, which tends to promote religion and virtue amongſt mankind.

The keeping holy the ſabbath-day was originally enjoined, by a poſitive commandment, to the Jews in the Moſaic law; and, as ſuch, was obſerved by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, as was every other part of that law, and was afterwards retained by the Chriſtians

Chriſtians of all ſucceeding ages, for its peculiar excellence and utility, when all the reſt were laid aſide. But I do not recollect that it is any where injoined by Chriſt or his Apoſtles, or even mentioned in the New Teſtament, except in this and ſome other places in which he reproves the Phariſees for their hypocritical and ſuperſtitious obſervance of it, by converting a day that was intended to be ſet apart for reſt, joy, and thankſgiving, into a ſeaſon of mortification and ſelf-denial of all comforts and conveniences of life.

But this leſſens not the force of our obligation to keep this day in a proper manner; that is, to abſtain from labour and all worldly cares and occupations, and to employ it in acts of devotion, charity, and hoſpitality; for which we have the example of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and of every Chriſtian church from their times to the preſent day. The excellence, likewiſe, of the inſtitution itſelf cannot fail to recommend it; for certainly, there never was any other ſo well calculated to promote the intereſts of piety and virtue, to call off the worldly-minded from the perpetual toils of ambition and avarice, and to give leiſure to thoſe who are better diſpoſed, to improve and cultivate thoſe better diſpoſitions; to afford relief to the poor from inceſſant labour, and to the rich from continual diſſipation, and to produce ſome ſenſe of religion in the vulgar, and ſome appearance of it in the great.

MARK

MARK viii. 38.

Ὃς γαρ ἂν ἐπαισχυνθῃ με και τους ἐμους λογους ἐν τῃ γενεᾳ ταυτῃ τῃ μοιχαλιδι και ἁμαρτωλῳ, και ὁ υἱος του ἀνθρωπου ἐπαισχυνθησεται αὐτον ὁταν ἐλθῃ ἐν τῃ δοξῃ του πατρος αὐτου, μετα των ἀγγελων των ἁγιων.

Whoſoever, therefore, ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father.

MANY and ſevere are the threats which we find denounced by Chriſt againſt hypocrites; that is, againſt thoſe who pretended an extraordinary ſanctity in their manners and converſation, without having any true ſenſe of religion or morality in their hearts. The words before us are a threat, likewiſe, againſt hypocrites, but hypocrites of a very different ſort; thoſe who pretend to be more profligate than they really are, and therefore may properly be called hypocrites in wickedneſs. Theſe are much more numerous in the preſent times, and perhaps more miſchievous than the former; as thoſe do honour to religion and virtue by their pretences to them, theſe affront them by an open diſavowal. Thoſe make others better than themſelves, and theſe worſe, by their example. We meet with this ridiculous and criminal kind of hypocriſy every day; we ſee men affecting to be guilty of vices for which they have no reliſh, of profligacy for which they have not conſtitutions, and of crimes

which they have not courage to perform. They lay claim to the honour of cheating, at the time they are cheated, and endeavour to paſs for knaves, when, in fact, they are but fools. Theſe are the offenders of whom Chriſt will be aſhamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father; which will be a dreadful but juſt puniſhment, and a proper retaliation of that fooliſh and impious modeſty, which induced them to be aſhamed of him and his word, in complaiſance to a ſinful and adulterous generation; and to be leſs afraid of incurring the diſpleaſure of the beſt of all Beings, than the profane ridicule of the worſt of men.

MARK xvi. 15, 16.

Και εἶπεν αὐτοις· Πορευθεντες εἰς τον κοσμον ἁπαντα, κηρυξαλε το εὐαγγελιον πασῃ τῃ κλισει.

Ὁ πιϛευσας και βαπλισθεις σωθησελαι· ὁ δε ἀπιϛησας, καλακριθησελαι.

And he ſaid unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the goſpel to every creature.

He that believeth, and is baptiſed, ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.

THIS is the commiſſion, together with the promiſes and threats annexed to it, which Chriſt gave to his Apoſtles when he ſent them forth to preach the goſpel to every part of the world: in which theſe three important

portant queſtions offer themſelves to our ſerious conſideration; What is meant by believing? What is meant by being ſaved? and, What by being damned?—Believing cannot here be underſtood to ſignify the giving aſſent to the tradition of one church, or to the creeds and articles of another, or even to the hiſtorical facts recorded in the New Teſtament; becauſe, at the time when this commiſſion was delivered, no church exiſted, no creeds or articles were formed, nor was the New Teſtament written. Believing, in the language of that book, is for the moſt part uſed as a term ſynonymous to that of becoming a Chriſtian. Thus it is related of the nobleman, whoſe ſon Jeſus had cured, "Himſelf believed, and his whole houſe*;" and thus it is ſaid, that "many of the Jews, "which had ſeen the things which Jeſus did, "believed on him†;" that is, were converted to the religion which he taught, and became Chriſtians; for which purpoſe nothing more was then required, than to acknowledge that Jeſus was the Son of God (that is, the Meſſiah expected by the Jews and foretold by the Prophets), and to receive baptiſm as an external and viſible ſign of their initiation into his holy fraternity, which was immediately adminiſtered to them on their aſſenting to this ſingle propoſition, as we find it

* John iv. 53. † John xi. 45.

was by Philip to the eunuch, without aſking any further queſtions.

In the next place, What is meant by being ſaved? In order to underſtand this expreſſion, it is neceſſary to recollect that, throughout the New Teſtament, we are every where informed, that mankind, in the preſent life, are in a ſtate of guilt and depravity, under ſentence of condemnation, and incapable of admiſſion into the kingdom of Heaven that, in order to redeem them from this unhappy ſituation, Chriſt came into the world, and offered them a religion which was effectual for that purpoſe; and that, whoever ſhall believe on him (that is, acknowledge his divine authority, accept the religion which he taught, and teſtify this acceptance by baptiſm) ſhall by this, and the atonement made for ſin by his ſufferings and death, be ſaved (that is, abſolved from their guilt, excuſed from that ſentence, freed from that incapacity, and placed in a ſtate, which, although it may be forfeited by their future miſbehaviour, is, in the language of ſcripture, called ſalvation). This I take to be the true meaning of being ſaved; which, without ſome retroſpect, can have no meaning at all.

By being damned, is not here to be underſtood, being conſigned to a ſtate of everlaſting puniſhment, according to the vulgar acceptation of that phraſe in our tranſlation, in which ſenſe, I believe, it is no where uſed by

by the writers of the New Teſtament—the original word is καταϰριθησεται, *condemnabitur*, which ſignifies ſimply, *will be condemned or found guilty*, without referring to any puniſhment whatever. In the preſent inſtance, it means nothing more than the reverſe of being ſaved. "He that believeth will be ſaved, but he that believeth not cannot be ſaved;" that is, Whoever refuſes this gracious offer can receive no benefit from it, but muſt remain in the ſame ſtate of guilt, condemnation, and excluſion from the kingdom of Heaven, as if no ſuch offer had been made; not as a puniſhment, but as a neceſſary conſequence of his unbelief. This is not a threat, but a declaration; in which there is no more injuſtice or ſeverity, than in that of a phyſician, who, having preſcribed a ſpecific medicine to a patient labouring under an inveterate diſeaſe, aſſures him, that if he takes it, he will certainly recover; but if he will not, he will as certainly die.—This fair interpretation of this paſſage I think a full vindication of the juſtice and goodneſs of God, from the blaſphemous imputations ſometimes thrown on the divine conduct, in condemning his creatures to eternal miſery, merely for not aſſenting to propoſitions which many cannot believe, and more cannot underſtand; for which there is not the leaſt foundation in the words before us.

LUKE xi. 8.

Λεγω ὑμιν, εἰ και ὐ δωσει αὐτῳ ἀναςας, δια το εἰναι αὐτυ φιλον, δια γε την ἀναιδειαν αὐτυ ἐγερθεις δωσει αὐτῳ ὁσων χρηζει.

I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend; yet, because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

THIS parable, and also another of the importunate widow, in the second chapter, seems to represent the Deity as teazed into compliance, and granting requests not from the reasonableness of the petition, or the merits of the petitioners, but merely to put an end to their troublesome importunities. This in man would certainly be a weakness, but in the Supreme Judge and disposer of all things is an absolute impossibility; and therefore cannot be the intention of this parable. But, in order to understand the sense of this, and many other passages in both the Old and New Testament, we should remember, that although these, as well as other writings of remoter ages, abound in more sublime ideas, and more beautiful figures, than the compositions of later ages; yet we must not expect to find in them the same correctness and precision. In their similes, provided there were some resemblance in their principal features, little regard was paid to their disagreement in all the rest. Thus the Psalmist compares the unity of brethren to the precious

precious ointment on the head of Aaron, which ran down to his beard, and even to the ſkirts of his cloathing; between which there is not the leaſt ſimilitude, except that they were both precious and pleaſant things. In their parables and fables, provided the great outlines correſponded with the moral which they deſigned to inculcate, they attended not to the collateral circumſtances which were introduced into the ſtory; and therefore we ought never to draw any concluſions from them. Thus, in the parable of the marriage of the king's ſon, the king, obſerving that one of the gueſts had not a wedding-garment, commanded him to be bound hand and foot, and caſt into outer darkneſs; by which we are taught, that whoſoever comes to Chriſt, that is, pretends to be a Chriſtian, without the proper cloathing of righteouſneſs and faith, will incur his diſpleaſure, and be ſeverely puniſhed.—But we muſt not compare the juſt diſpenſations of Providence, with the unjuſt ſentence of the king, who puniſhed a man for not having on a wedding-garment, who had been but juſt before picked up in the highway, and could not have been expected to have been properly dreſſed for ſuch an entertainment.

In like manner, in this parable, the ſole intention is to inculcate the duty of fervent and importunate prayer, together with the deſerved ſucceſs which attends it. This is very well illuſtrated by the perſevering importunity

portunity of the petitioner, and the compleat, though late, compliance of his friend. The motive which at laſt induced him to comply, after ſo long and obſtinate a refuſal, is a collateral circumſtance, which makes no part of the parable. The parable applies only to the fact, not to the motive, which produced it; and therefore that is not to be attended to.

LUKE xi. 24, 25, 26.

Οταν το ακαθαρτον πνευμα εξελθη απο τυ ανθρωπυ, διερχεται δι' ανυδρων τοπων ζητων αναπαυσιν· και μη ευρισκον, λεγει. Υποστρεψω εις τον οικον μυ, οθεν εξηλθον.

Και ελθον ευρισκει σεσαρωμενον και κεκοσμημενον.

Τοτε πορευεται και παραλαμβανει επτα ετερα πνευματα πονηροτερα εαυτυ, και εισελθοντα κατοικει εκει· και γινεται τα εσχατα τυ ανθρωπυ εκεινυ χειρονα των πρωτων.

When the unclean ſpirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, ſeeking reſt: and finding none, he ſaith, I will return to my houſe whence I came out.

And when he cometh, he findeth it ſwept and garniſhed.

Then goeth he, and taketh to him ſeven other ſpirits more wicked than himſelf, and they enter in and dwell there: and the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the firſt.

I KNOW of no paſſage throughout the New Teſtament ſo obſcure as this, nor onewhic h the commentators have been ſo little able to explain:—for which end, it is in the firſt place neceſſary to obſerve, that, in the times in which the goſpels were written, an opinion

nion was univerſally adopted, both by Jews and Gentiles, that madneſs, idiotiſm, many of the diſeaſes and much of the wickedneſs of mankind, were occaſioned by evil ſpirits, who got poſſeſſion of their minds and bodies; and that theſe ſpirits, when caſt out by ſome ſuperior power, wandered about in ſolitary and uninhabited deſarts, reſtleſs and miſerable, until they were able to return to their old, or to occupy ſome new habitation.

This paſſage is plainly founded on this idea, and on this ſuppoſition will be found not altogether unintelligible; but may be fairly explained in the following manner:—"When the unclean ſpirit goeth out of a man, he, the ſpirit, walketh in dry places, (that is, wandereth about in dry and ſandy deſarts) ſeeking reſt; and finding none, he ſaith to himſelf, I will return to my houſe whence I came out (that is, to the poſſeſſion of the ſame perſon from whom I have been expelled); and when he cometh there, if he findeth it ſwept and garniſhed, (that is, prepared and made ready for his reception by the perſon's relapſe into his former ſtate of depravity) then taketh he to him ſeven ſpirits more wicked than himſelf, and they enter and dwell there (that is, they enter and fix their habitation there, and cannot again be caſt out); ſo the laſt ſtate of that man is worſe than the firſt."—The meaning of all which, diveſted of metaphor and reduced to common language, I take to be this:—When any

any one, who has by the power of reaſon and religion, expelled from his heart impious and malevolent diſpoſitions, infuſed into it by the operations of evil ſpirits, ſhall ſuffer himſelf again to fall under their dominion, they will return with ſevenfold ſtrength, and the man will be many degrees more wicked than he was before.

That evil ſpirits did, in thoſe ages, take poſſeſſion of the minds and bodies of human beings, we cannot doubt, if we give any credit to hiſtory, ſacred or profane; and, although the ſagacity of the preſent more enlightened times hath exploded this opinion with contempt and ridicule, yet we ſee daily inſtances, which muſt induce us to believe, that their power is not even now totally at an end. We ſee ſome labouring under diſeaſes which the moſt ſkilful phyſicians are unable to account for or to cure; others perpetrating the moſt horrid crimes without provocation, temptation, or advantage: we ſee the hand of the ſuicide plunging the dagger into his own breaſt, in contradiction to his reaſon, his principles, and his corporal feelings: And muſt we not conclude, that all theſe unaccountable actions proceed from the directions of ſome external powers, which the actors are unable to reſiſt? In madneſs we plainly perceive two diſtinct wills operating at the ſame time, one of which compels a man to commit the moſt outrageous acts, which the other diſapproves,

proves, but cannot controul; nay, ſometimes foreſees, for a conſiderable time, that he ſhall be ſo compelled, but is unable to prevent it.

I cannot conclude this obſervation, without adding another, on the next ſucceeding verſe, in which we are informed, that, "as "he ſpake theſe things, a certain woman of "the company lift up her voice, and ſaid "unto him, Bleſſed is the womb that bare "thee, and the paps which thou haſt ſucked." She had liſtened to his excellent and intelligible diſcourſe for ſome time, which ſhe perfectly underſtood; but when he ſpake theſe things, which were above her comprehenſion, ſhe could no longer forbear lifting up her voice and uttering this pathetic exclamation, to expreſs her applauſe and admiration. This is a picture ſo exactly copied from nature and experience, that we can have no doubt of its truth; and is here only mentioned as a mark of the fidelity with which the moſt minute incidents are recorded by the Evangelical hiſtorians.

LUKE xiv. 10.

Ἀλλ' ὁταν κληθῃς, πορευθεις ἀναπεσον εἰς τον ἐσχαΐον τοπον.

But when thou art bidden, go and ſit down in the loweſt room.

CHRISTIANITY is the beſt-bred religion in the world, although the manners of ſome of its moſt rigid profeſſors ſeem to contradict this aſſertion. There is not a ſingle quality required in the compoſition of a true Chriſtian, which is not equally requiſite in the character of a well bred man; nor a ſingle deviation from politeneſs, which does not, under the Chriſtian law, become a crime, becauſe it tends to defeat the two great objects of that holy inſtitution, which are to promote peace and good-will on earth, and to qualify us for the kingdom of heaven.

Many were the leſſons by which Chriſt endeavoured to infuſe this amiable virtue into the minds of his diſciples; in the command before us he forbids every inſolent attempt to precedence, as equally adverſe to Chriſtianity as to good manners, as it denotes a proud heart and high ſpirit, inconſiſtent with the humble precepts of that religion. He ſays, "Whoſoever ſhall com-"pel thee to go a mile, go with him twain," that is, In the intercourſes of ſocial life, be ready to comply with every innocent propoſal, and in every office of civility perform twice

twice as much, as is either required or expected. This, therefore, is Chriſtianity, as well as politeneſs.—Again, he ſays, "Whoſoever ſhall be angry with his brother, without a cauſe," (that is, ſhall enter into violent, angry, and peeviſh diſputes about nothing) "ſhall be in danger of the judgment [or diſpleaſure of God]; but whoſoever ſhall ſay to his brother, Thou fool! ſhall be in danger of hell-fire;" that is, Who ſhall make uſe of ſuch opprobrious and affronting expreſſions as may provoke retaliation and reſentment, which may end in violence and bloodſhed, is anſwerable for the conſequences, and therefore ſhall be in danger of the ſevereſt puniſhment.—Thus we ſee, that every virtue enjoined by Chriſtianity as a duty, is recommended by politeneſs as an accompliſhment. Gentleneſs, humility, deference, affability, and a readineſs to aſſiſt and ſerve on all occaſions, are as neceſſary in the compoſition of a true Chriſtian as in that of a well-bred man; paſſion, moroſeneſs, peeviſhneſs, and ſupercilious ſelf-ſufficiency, are equally repugnant to the characters of both:—who differ in this only, that the true Chriſtian really is what the well-bred man but pretends to be, and would be ſtill better bred if he was.

LUKE xv. 7.

Λεγω ὑμιν, ὁτι ὁτω χαρα ἐσται ἐν τῳ ὐρανῳ ἐπι ἑνι ἁμαρτωλῳ μετανοουντι, ἡ ἐπι ἐννενηκονταεννεα δικαιοις, οἱτινες ὁ χρειαν ἐχουσι μετανοιας.

I ſay unto you, That joy ſhall be in heaven over one ſinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine juſt perſons who need no repentance.

SOME modern enthuſiaſts entertain ſuch favourable ideas of repentance, as to place it higher, in the catalogue of Chriſtian virtues, than even perfect innocence itſelf. They ſeem to think, that a man muſt be a ſinner before he can be a ſaint; and that, if his repentance be ſincere, his merits will riſe in proportion to his paſt offences. Nay, ſome have gone ſo far as to recommend wickedneſs as preparatory to repentance, and therefore neceſſary to inſure our ſalvation. Falſe and impious as theſe principles are, they may, perhaps, like moſt errors, have ſome foundation in truth miſunderſtood; for we certainly ſee in this, and many other parts of the New Teſtament, an extraordinary degree of merit imputed, and an extraordinary degree of favour ſhewn, to earneſt and ſincere repentance; although repentance, however ſincere and ſucceſsful, can do no more than place the ſinner in the ſame ſtate as if he had never offended. How then comes it to paſs, that we find here a more joyful reception into heaven beſtowed

ſtowed upon the ſinner who hath repented, than upon ninety-nine juſt perſons who need no repentance? This ſeems to be a diſpenſation not eaſily reconcileable with the wiſdom and juſtice of God; and therefore I do not apprehend that, by theſe words, any preference is given to ſinners who repent, above the righteous who need no repentance, becauſe, in ſuch a ſtate of perfection no human being ever exiſted; and therefore the competition can only lie between thoſe who have committed great crimes, of which they are truly ſenſible, and have ſincerely repented, and thoſe who have been daily guilty of many ſmaller offences, of which they are ſo little conſcious as to think they need no repentance. This is clearly exemplified by the parable of the Phariſee and the Publican, who went up to the temple to pray*. The Phariſee, unconſcious of his unworthineſs, thought he needed no repentance, and therefore only thanked God that he was not as other men; extortioners, unjuſt, adulterous, or even as this Publican: the Publican, ſenſible of the many crimes which he had committed, and ſincerely ſorry for them, ſtood afar off, and would not ſo much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but ſmote upon his breaſt, ſaying, "God be merciful to me a ſinner." "I tell you," ſays Chriſt, "this

* Luke xviii. 10.

"man

" man went down to his houſe juſtified ra-
" ther than the other."

Perhaps, alſo, there may be ſomething in a ſincere repentance for paſt offences, more acceptable to God, and more congenial to the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, and therefore more productive of joy in heaven, than in any degree of original righteouſneſs of which human nature is capable. The painter and the ſculptor ſhew, that beauty cannot be formed by compaſſes and a rule; a face in which every feature was faultleſs would be ſtiff, formal, and unpleaſing; there muſt be ſome ſmall deviations from exact ſymmetry to enable it to ſtrike the eye and captivate the heart of every beholder. Juſt ſo in our morals, was it poſſible for any one to act at all times, and on all occaſions, as he ought, his conduct would form a character rather admirable than amiable, unnatural to man, and unlike that of a Chriſtian, becauſe it would certainly be accompanied with ſome kind of arrogance, ſelf-ſufficiency, and independence, inconſiſtent with the lowlineſs, humility, and diffidence, eſſential to that religion. Chriſtianity does not expect that we ſhould be guilty of no offences, but that we be ſorry for them. It does not require perfection, of which we are incapable; but a broken and contrite heart, repentance for ſins paſt, and perpetual endeavours after future amendment, which is in every man's power. This is the ſole principle on which this

this holy inſtitution is founded, and therefore it is not ſurpriſing that there ſhould be extraordinary joy in heaven on every inſtance of the ſalutary effects of it, in the converſion and ſalvation of a ſinner.

Experience teaches us, that we receive more joy from the unexpected return of any good, than from the uninterrupted poſſeſſion of it; from regaining a loſt treaſure, than from its undiſturbed enjoyment; or the recovery of a beloved friend from a dangerous diſeaſe, than from the knowledge of his continual health. This is both natural and rational. Why then ſhould not the angels in heaven be affected with the ſame ſenſations from the ſame cauſe?

LUKE xvi. 9.

Καγω υμιν λεγω· Ποιησαθε εαυτοις φιλους εκ τε μαμωνα της αδικιας, ινα οταν εκλιπητε, δεξωνται υμας εις τας αιωνιους σκηνας.

And I ſay unto you, make to yourſelves friends of the mammon of unrighteouſneſs; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlaſting habitations.

NO commentator, ancient or modern, has yet been able to give us a ſatisfactory explanation of this exhortation, delivered by Chriſt to a very numerous audience: the moſt plauſible is this—That by the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, we are to underſtand ill-gotten wealth; and the advice

which Chriſt here gives to thoſe who have ſo acquired it, is to employ it in acts of charity and beneficence, by which means, though they fail in other parts of their duty, they may obtain admiſſion into everlaſting life.—This interpretation might do very well, if the words would bear it; but it is certainly impoſſible, by any torture, to extract out of them ſuch a meaning; and if ſuch a meaning could be allowed, it would not in the leaſt correſpond with the preceding parable: in order to underſtand which, as well as the words before us, it is neceſſary to recollect, both on what occaſion they were ſpoken, and to whom they were addreſſed.

We find, in the foregoing chapter, that whilſt Jeſus was delivering theſe ſeveral parables to a very great multitude, he obſerved amongſt them ſome Phariſees attending in the crowd; a ſet of men who were perpetually employed in external acts of piety and devotion, and as conſtantly buſied in every ſpecies of extortion and fraud. To theſe Phariſees, equally remarkable for their religion and their roguery, this exhortation was with peculiar propriety addreſſed; in which, I apprehend, we are to underſtand, by the mammon of unrighteouſneſs, the kingdom of Satan; the exiſtence of which was univerſally believed in thoſe times, and is frequently mentioned or alluded to in the ſcriptures, and placed in oppoſition to the kingdom of God. The advice here given

to

to theſe men is this—not to attempt, at the ſame time, to ſerve God and Mammon; but, when they, by their iniquities, have loſt all hopes of admiſſion into the kingdom of light, to ſecure a reception in the kingdom of darkneſs, and to imitate the example of the unjuſt ſteward, in the parable which he had juſt before delivered to them, who, having abandoned all expectations of future ſupport from his lord, on account of his miſbehaviour, had endeavoured to conciliate to himſelf the goodneſs of his tenants, that when he was put out of the ſtewardſhip, they might receive him into their houſes; for which artful precaution his lord commended him, becauſe he had done wiſely, but totally rejected him becauſe he had not done honeſtly.—This, I think, is a juſt and fair explanation of this abſtruſe paſſage; which ſeems to be rather an ironical reproof of the Phariſees for their hypocriſy and avarice, than a ſerious direction for their conduct, and bears ſome reſemblance to what Joſhua ſaid to the Iſraelites; "If it ſeem evil unto "you to ſerve the Lord, chooſe you this day "whom you will ſerve *:" ſo Chriſt ſays, If you will not be ſubjects of the kingdom of God, make yourſelves friends in the kingdom of Satan.

* Joſhua xxiv. 15.

LUKE xvi. 25.

Εἰπε δε Ἀβρααμ· Τεκνον, μνησθηθι ὁτι ἀπελαβες ου τα ἀγαθα σε ἐν τη ζωη σε, και Λαζαρος ὁμοιως τα κακα· νυν δε ὁδε παρακαλειται, συ δε ὀδυνασαι.

But Abraham ſaid, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receiveďſt thy good things, and likewiſe Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

ALL the commentators on this parable ſeem to have miſtaken the intention and moral of it; they have all underſtood it, as deſigned only to inform us, that no judgment can be formed of men's condition in a future life, by the appearances in the preſent, of either their proſperity or diſtreſs: that the rich and great will, if criminal, certainly meet with the puniſhment due to their offences, in another ſtate, which, by the influence of their power, they may have evaded in this; and the poor and diſeaſed, if virtuous, will there receive retribution for all the miſeries and ill-treatment which they have undeſervedly ſuffered. In order to accommodate the parable to this interpretation, they have conſtantly painted the character of Dives in the blackeſt, and that of Lazarus in the brighteſt colours; for which there is not the leaſt foundation in the parable itſelf, as there is not one word ſaid of the criminality of the one, or the merits of the other; Abraham, in his anſwer to the rich man,

man, does not bid him to remember, that he acquired his wealth by fraud or rapine, or that he had expended it in profligacy or oppreſſion; and that, therefore, he ought not to complain of puniſhment which he had ſo juſtly deſerved. He ſays nothing of the virtues of Lazarus, that he had been pious, ſober, honeſt, and patient; he only anſwers the complainant in a friendly manner, "Son, "remember that thou in thy life-time re-"ceivedſt good things, and likewiſe Lazarus "evil things; but now he is comforted, and "thou art tormented:" by which I apprehend, he means to addreſs him:—"Son, although thy preſent ſituation is very wretched, and that of Lazarus no leſs happy, thou haſt no reaſon to arraign the partiality of God; but oughteſt to remember, that thou, in a former ſtate, enjoyedſt all the pleaſures of wealth and proſperity, and that then Lazarus ſuffered all the miſeries of poverty, and diſeaſe, but that now he is comforted, and thou art tormented, in conformity to that impartial and eternal law of Providence, which inſtituted the perpetual rotation of good and evil."

From this parable we may learn, that the Supreme diſpoſer of all things diſtributes good and evil amongſt his creatures, not only with juſtice, but with a greater degree of equality than we imagine; and that this he is enabled to perform by having ſo wonderfully contrived the diſpoſition of things, and the conſtitution of man, that riches, power,

power, wealth, and prosperity, in this life, actually lead him into many vices, which will incur punishment in another; and sickness, poverty, and distress, are as naturally productive of many virtues, which will there merit a reward; by which means happiness and misery are more equally distributed, at the same time that strict justice is done to every individual according to his deserts, and no one can have any cause to complain.

This idea of the rotation of good and evil, of enjoyments and sufferings, is confirmed by the clearest allusions in several parts of the New Testament; for instance, we there read, that, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, "than for a rich man to enter into the "kingdom of God *;" not because, it is criminal to be rich, but because, whilst riches bestow on their possessors many present gratifications, they usually make them proud, insolent and profligate, which incapacitates them from becoming members of that holy and happy community. Again, it is said, "Blessed are those that mourn, for they "shall be comforted †;" not because there is any merit in mourning, but because afflictions naturally tend to make men humble, sober, patient, and virtuous in this life, for which they will deserve and receive a recompence of comfort in another. This wise

* Matt. xix. 24. † Matt. v. 4.

disposition

disposition of Providence, in the general course of things, although it marks his impartiality, is no impediment to his justice, because it lays no one under compulsion, and may be interrupted by the conduct of every individual. The rich are not obliged to be wicked, nor the poor to be virtuous; a rich man may employ his wealth in such a manner in this life, as to acquire happiness by it in another; and a poor man may be so incorrigible as to make himself very miserable in both. All that we are to learn from it is, to take extraordinary care to avoid those crimes to which our situation renders us peculiarly liable.

JOHN iii. 3.

Ἀπεκριθη ὁ Ἰησους, και ειπεν αὐτῳ· Ἀμην ἀμην λεγω σοι, ἐαν μη τις γεννηθη ἀνωθεν, ὐ δυναται ἰδειν την βασιλειαν τυ Θευ.

Jesus answered, and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

THE meaning of which is this:—That mankind are born or come into the world with dispositions so depraved, so prone to anger, malice, revenge, avarice, and ambition, that it is impossible for them ever to enter into the kingdom of Heaven, except they are so totally changed as to become new creatures. No partial alteration will do; it must be an entire change of temper, sentiments,

ſentiments, habits, manners, inclinations, and purſuits. All theſe turbulent and high-ſpirited paſſions muſt be eradicated, and meekneſs, gentleneſs, and poorneſs of ſpirit, introduced in their room; anger muſt give place to patience, malice to benevolence, revenge to forgiveneſs, and all worldly purſuits to a conſtant habit of piety and devotion. This, in the language of ſcripture, is properly and emphatically ſtyled being born again; becauſe it is a kind of entrance upon a new life, and a commencement of a ſtate entirely different from the former. The neceſſity for this change is ſufficiently evident, becauſe, if men could be permitted to carry theſe evil diſpoſitions with them into the kingdom of God, they would not be happy themſelves, nor ſuffer others to be ſo.

We ſee that even upon earth, if a wicked, malignant, and turbulent man was confined for life, in a virtuous, peaceable, and pious ſociety, it would be no inconſiderable puniſhment; and much more ſevere would it be in heaven, where the contraſt is greater and the duration longer. Wickedneſs and miſery are by nature ſo cloſely united, that they cannot be ſeparated, and therefore neither of them can have a place in the kingdom of God. If any one's diſpoſitions are cruel, malignant, envious, turbulent, factious, and ambitious, though, in contradiction to their impulſe, he ſhould perform all the duties of piety, benevolence, humility, and

and ſubmiſſion, he could not become a member of this holy and happy ſociety, becauſe his admiſſion would be rather a puniſhment than a reward: before he could attain this ſtate of felicity, he muſt be qualified to enjoy it, and this can only be effected by being born again. How a man is to be born again, Jeſus further informs us in the ſucceeding verſe; he there ſays, "Except a "man be born of water and of the Spirit, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" that is, except a man be born again, by embracing the doctrines and obeying the precepts of his religion, for which purpoſe the external ſign of baptiſm, and the internal aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit, are abſolutely neceſſary. By theſe, together with ſincere repentance and reformation, he may become a new perſon, and perfectly qualified to be, and to make others happy in that bleſſed community; and when qualified, however great may have been his former offences, he will be readily admitted, and there will be joy in heaven at his reception.

JOHN vi. 44.

Οὐδεὶς δύναται ἐλθειν προς με, ἐαν μη ὁ πατηρ ὁ πεμψας με, ἑλκυση αὐτον.

No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath ſent me, draw him.

MOST of our commentators, apprehenſive leſt the obvious ſenſe of theſe words would lead them into difficulties concerning the grace of God, and the free-will of man, which they were unable to ſolve, have endeavoured to explain them away, and ſubſtitute other ſignifications, for which there is no authority. The true meaning I take to be this:—"No man," ſays Chriſt, "can believe the doctrines, or obey the precepts, which I teach, except he is enabled by the aſſiſtance and the grace of God:" by which we are not to underſtand any ſudden irreſiſtible impulſe, as ſome enthuſiaſts would perſuade us; but, except God ſhall be pleaſed to diſpoſe his heart, and alſo the circumſtances of his ſituation, in ſuch a manner as to draw him into the right road of faith and obedience. This is the declaration of Chriſt, and the doctrine univerſally enforced by all the writers of the New Teſtament. St. Paul ſays, "Not "that we are ſufficient of ourſelves to think "any thing as of ourſelves, but our ſuffici-"ency is of God *." He ſays alſo to the Phi-

* Cor. iii. 5.

lipians,

lipians, " For it is God which worketh in you " both to will and to do, of his good plea- " ſure *". This is the conſtant language of the ſcriptures; in which we are every where exhorted to ſeek, to depend on, to hope for, and to pray for this divine influence on our thoughts and actions, as neceſſary to our thinking any thing right, or performing any thing good: and yet we are conſtantly conſidered, by the whole tenour of thoſe writings, as free agents, poſſeſſed of perfect liberty to do good or evil, and as ſuch we are inſtructed, admoniſhed, tempted by rewards, and threatened with puniſhments. How contradictory ſoever theſe two propoſitions may ſeem, they are both undoubtedly true. Of the firſt we cannot fail of being convinced by reaſon, nor of the latter by experience. Reaſon aſſures us, that no creature can think or act independant of his Creator, in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being, and from whom he receives power to think or act at all; and it ſeems indeed impoſſible that a Creator, however omnipotent, ſhould beſtow on his creatures ſuch a degree of freedom as to make them independent of himſelf: for he muſt infuſe into their original frames ſome diſpoſitions, good or bad; he muſt give them reaſon ſuperior to their paſſions, or paſſions uncontrouled by their reaſon; he muſt endue them with a

* Phil. ii. 13.

greater

greater or leſs degree of wiſdom or folly; he muſt place them within or beyond the reach of temptations, and within the view of virtuous or vicious examples. All theſe circumſtances muſt proceed from his diſpenſations, and from theſe their elections and conſequent conduct muſt be derived. Of the latter, which is, that we are poſſeſſed of full liberty to chooſe good or evil, to do, or forbear doing, any action; every moment's experience aſſures us with equal certainty. This is not a matter of argument, but of feeling; and we can no more doubt of our being poſſeſſed of this power, than of our ſight, hearing, or any of our corporeal ſenſes.

How theſe two contradictory propoſitions can be reconciled, is above the reach of our comprehenſions, and is but another mark, added to many, of their weakneſs and imperfection. We have no faculties which are able to ſolve this difficulty, and therefore ought to leave it to that omniſcient Being who framed, and is alone acquainted with the compoſition of the human mind. Each of theſe opinions has been ſupported by different ſects of philoſophers, with equal warmth; but it is remarkable, that the Chriſtian is the only religious or moral inſtitution which ventured to aſſert the truth of them both; which, as they are both undoubtedly true, ſeems no inconſiderable proof of the ſupernatural information and authority of that diſpenſation.

JOHN

JOHN vi. 53.

Εἶπεν ἐν αὐτοις ὁ Ἰησες· Ἀμην ἀμην λεγω ὑμιν, ἐαν μη φαγητε την σαρκα του ὑιου του ἀνθρωπε, και πιητε αὐτε το αἱμα, ὐκ ἐχετε ζωην ἐν ἑαυτοις.

Then Jeſus ſaid unto them, Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Except ye eat the fleſh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

THESE remarkable words of Chriſt, being the very ſame which he afterwards uſed in the inſtitution of the ſacrament of his laſt ſupper, we cannot but conclude that they muſt have the ſame meaning. Modern expoſitors have, indeed, in both places, explained them in ſuch a manner, as to leave them no meaning at all; they would perſuade us, that they are merely figurative and metaphorical, and think, by eating the body, and drinking the blood of Chriſt, nothing more is to be underſtood, than being intimately united to him, by believing his doctrines and obeying his precepts; and that, when applied to the bread and wine received in the ſacrament, they mean only that theſe are ſymbols of his ſufferings and death. But they are ſurely too expreſſive, too much inſiſted on, and too often repeated, to admit of ſo cold an interpretation; nor is it credible that Chriſt would have made uſe of an expreſſion for the ſake of metaphor, which ſhocked his hearers, offended his diſciples, and

and has produced the moſt violent contentions amongſt them from that time to the preſent hour.

The Evangeliſts who heard them, and have ſo emphatically recorded them, had very different ideas of the importance of theſe words, and ſo had St. Paul, who reproved the Corinthians who received unworthily, by not diſcerning the Lord's body; that is, by not perceiving that they were then not eating and drinking bread and wine as their daily food, but ſomething which, by powers ſupernaturally annexed to it, would produce the moſt important effects on their preſent diſpoſitions and future happineſs. Our firſt reformers, though they rejected tranſubſtantiation, yet retained the higheſt veneration for this ſacrament, the ſanctity of the elements, and the importance of their effects on the communicants; and I am inclined to think, that they underſtood the ſenſe of the ſcriptures better, and the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity more correctly, than our preſent reformers of reformation. Theſe ſet up reaſon as the meaſure of truth, and then pare away the ſcriptures to make them fit it: thoſe ſearched them with diligence and candour, to find out their true and genuine ſignifications, without any regard to the deciſions of human reaſon; from hence they formed their opinions and doctrines, and from them their creeds and articles; and on this principle we ought to ſubſcribe them

—by

—by which we do not aſſert their truth, but their conformity to the ſenſe of the ſcriptures, which they were intended to explain: the truth and authority of thoſe writings is another queſtion.

Several of our modern divines repreſent the ſacrament of the Lord's Supper as a mere commemoration of his ſufferings and death; by which they entirely deſtroy the end and intent of it: for, although this is a poſitive inſtitution, it is of a moral nature, becauſe it is deſigned to drive the wicked into repentance and amendment; and for this purpoſe it is moſt admirably contrived, becauſe, if they have not totally rejected the Chriſtian ſcheme, it lays them under inſuperable difficulties, as it obliges them either to augment their guilt, by the neglect of a poſitive command, or, by obeying it without repentance and reformation, to ratify their own condemnation. But if theſe very extraordinary words of Chriſt have no meaning, or mean nothing more than a bare commemoration—if conſecration confers no ſanctity on the bread and wine—if thoſe who receive them worthily receive no benefit, nor thoſe who receive them unworthily incur no danger—the inſtitution is vain and uſeleſs, and has no more concern with our religion or morals than the commemoration of gunpowder treaſon, or of any other event recorded in the hiſtory of former times.—Although, therefore, we cannot believe, in contradiction

contradiction to our ſenſes, that by theſe emphatical words of Chriſt the material ſubſtance of the elements is changed; yet, ſurely, we may believe, without the imputation of credulity, that they have ſome meaning; and that, by them, powers, property, and effects may be annexed to the proper uſe of the ſacrament, which may greatly contribute to our obtaining pardon for our paſt offences, prevent us from falling into future tranſgreſſions, and eſſentially aſſiſt us in our progreſs to everlaſting life.

JOHN vii. 46.

Οὐδεπὸτε ἐτως ἐλαλησεν ἀνθρωπος, ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἀνθρωπος.

Never man ſpake like this man.

I HAVE always been of opinion, that the moſt convincing proof of the divine authority of the Chriſtian revelation may be drawn from the originality of its doctrines, precepts, and the character of its author. This religion teaches us, that mankind come into the world in a ſtate of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, from which they cannot be redeemed, but by the merits and mediation of Jeſus Chriſt, together with their own ſincere repentance, reformation, and faith in him; and that, on theſe terms, God will accept his ſufferings and death, as an atone-

ment

ment for their ſins; but that theſe terms they are unable to comply with, without the ſuperintendency of his grace and aſſiſtance, although they are endued with perfect free-will, and are accountable for the uſe of it.—All theſe doctrines are ſo entirely new, that they had never entered into the head of any one before, and never any man, but this man, had thought or ſpake any thing like them. Impoſture always puts on the garb of truth, and reſembles her as near as ſhe can; but in all theſe propoſitions there appears not even a pretence to probability, and therefore, as they cannot be invention, we may reaſonably conclude that they muſt be true.

The moral precepts of this inſtitution are, indeed, ſimilar to thoſe of all others; but in this reſpect they alſo are entirely new, that they are carried to a higher degree of purity and perfection, than was ever thought of by the legiſlators and philoſophers of preceding ages. They had ſome diſtant proſpect of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, but they ſaw it through a glaſs darkly, obſcured by clouds of doubt and uncertainty; but this man ſpake of it with certainty and authority, removed all the intervening clouds, and ſhewed it in the cleareſt day-light.

The character of the great author of this diſpenſation, is not leſs new than the religion itſelf; there is no inſtance, in the hiſtory of mankind, of the founder of a religion, who propoſed by it no benefit to himſelf, as

well as to the world, who intended not to acquire wealth, power, and dominion over his followers; nor an inſtitution in the conſtruction of which this intention is not evidently viſible. But Chriſt diſavows all pretences to ſuch acquiſitions, choſe nothing for himſelf, and promiſed nothing to his diſciples but poverty, diſgrace, ſufferings, and death.

The progreſs of this religion was equally new and unprecedented with all the reſt; for in the courſe of a few years it triumphed over all oppoſition, from reaſon and philoſophy, from principalities and powers, and ſpread itſelf over all the moſt civilized and learned countries then in the world. This verified the wiſe prediction of Gamaliel; who ſaid to the High-prieſt, deſirous of perſecuting the Apoſtles, "Let them alone; for "if this counſel or work be of men, it will "come to nought; but if it be of God, ye "cannot overthrow it *."

* Acts v. 38, 39.

JOHN

JOHN viii. 57, 58.

Εἶπον οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι πρὸς αὐτόν· Πεντηκοντα ἔτη οὔπω ἔχεις, καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἑωρακας;
Εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησους· Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λεγω ὑμιν, πριν Ἀβραὰμ γενεσθαι ἐγω εἰμι.

Then ſaid the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and haſt thou ſeen Abraham?
Jeſus ſaid unto them, Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

IN this ſhort reply of Jeſus to the Jews, there is ſomething exceedingly remarkable; of which the commentators have taken no notice, though it is ſurpriſing that ſo uncommon an expreſſion ſhould have eſcaped their obſervation.

Had he ſaid, "Before Abraham was, I "was," the obvious meaning would have been no more than this, that he had exiſted from all eternity, and conſequently before the time of Abraham, though he had not made his appearance in this world before that age which was then preſent; but the extraordinary phraſe here uſed, by applying the preſent tenſe to a paſt event, muſt imply a great deal more, and refer to the mode of that eternal exiſtence. It ſeems, indeed, to amount to a plain declaration, that eternal exiſtence is permanent and unſucceſſive; not compoſed of days, and months, and years, like ours in

the preſent life, but one fixed unchangeable point bearing no relation to time at all; which we have no faculty to comprehend, no language to expreſs.

If this is the true nature of eternity, of which I have no doubt, this extraordinary declaration is no inconſiderable proof of the ſupernatural information of this extraordinary teacher; becauſe, in the ages and ſituation in which he lived, he never could have acquired ſuch an idea by any human means.

JOHN xvii. 40.

Ἐκραυγασαν ἐν παλιν παντες, λεγοντες· Μη τουτον, ἀλλα τον Βαραββαν· ἠν δε ὁ Βαραββας ληστης.

Then cried they all again, ſaying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

IT has frequently been well obſerved, that the Supreme diſpoſer of all things never interpoſes a ſupernatural power, whenever his deſigns can be accompliſhed by ordinary means; that is, by the paſſions and actions of free beings; the effects of which are as certain and uniform, as thoſe of matter and motion; and which, though to us not ſo viſible, are as accurately known by him who is perfectly acquainted with their frames and diſpoſitions, from whence their actions muſt inevitably be derived.

This is remarkably exemplified in the Evangelical hiſtory of the life and death of Jeſus

Jeſus Chriſt; in which we ſee that, in order to aſcertain his divine miſſion, and give a ſanctity to the religion which he taught, miraculous works were every day performed, becauſe this could not have been effected without them; but the whole progreſs of his perſecutions, ſufferings, and death, were left to the ordinary operations of the malevolence, wickedneſs, and ignorance of mankind, the uſual inſtruments which Providence employed to bring about the moſt important events: and by theſe we find that *this*, the moſt important of all others, was effected, without the aſſiſtance of a ſupernatural power; for no ſooner did Jeſus enter upon his benevolent office of inſtructing and reforming mankind, than he was miſunderſtood by ſome, and miſrepreſented by others; he was reviled, inſulted, and perſecuted, his doctrines were called blaſphemy, and his miracles imputed to the devil. In a little time the Jewiſh prieſthood (apprehenſive from his preaching of danger to their church) and the civil magiſtrates (fearful of inſurrection in the ſtate) united to deſtroy him. Falſe witneſſes were ſuborned to accuſe him, and one of his own diſciples was corrupted to betray him. He was then brought before the judgment-ſeat of a Roman governor, who though he declared that he found no fault in him, yet (fearing to offend the moſt powerful part of the nation over which he preſided, and ſtill more overawed by

by the name of Cæſar) preferred his own intereſt to the protection of friendleſs innocence, and condemned him to a cruel and ignominious death. But it being cuſtomary, at this time of the paſſover, to releaſe one malefactor at the requiſition of the people, and there being now one under ſentence of condemnation, called Barabbas, this timid judge propoſed an option to the populace, which of them he ſhould releaſe, hoping that they would do that juſtice which he himſelf had not courage to perform. But here a meek and virtuous character had no chance, in a competition for popularity with one who, though a robber, had been the ringleader of an inſurrection; and therefore they all cried out, again and again, "Not this man, but Barabbas." All this was but the ordinary proceſs of human wickedneſs, ignorance, and malevolence; and no miraculous interference appears in any part of this tranſaction, becauſe none was wanted. For, certainly, no miracle is requiſite to produce oppoſers of truth, enemies to reformation, perſecutors of innocence, and magiſtracy tenacious of their authority; a prieſthood jealous of their power, a ſervant bribed to betray his maſter, falſe witneſſes, a ſelf-intereſted judge, and a profligate and miſled populace. Theſe are the growth of every age and country in the world, and were fully ſufficient to accompliſh this important and aſtoniſhing event; and will ever remain a remarkable inſtance,

that

that the worſt actions of the worſt of men are ſometimes made uſe of, by the power and wiſdom of God, to carry into execution his moſt beneficent and ſalutary deſigns.

JOHN xx. 29.

Λεγει αὐτῳ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· Ὅτι ἑωρακας με, Θωμα, πεπιστευκας· μακαριοι οἱ μη ἰδοντες, και πιστευσαντες.

Jeſus ſaith unto him, Thomas, becauſe thou haſt ſeen me, thou haſt believed: bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.

WHAT! ſays the ſelf-ſufficient reaſoner, are thoſe the moſt bleſſed who believe without proof? And is the merit of faith greater, in proportion as the evidence for it is leſs?—To ſuch queriſts I only anſwer, That they underſtand not the nature of faith, nor in what the merit of it conſiſts. In the mere aſſent to a propoſition, there is no merit; becauſe, if the proof is obſcure, it is weakneſs; if clear, it is compulſion. It is not the *act*, but the *diſpoſition*, which places faith ſo high in the catalogue of Chriſtian virtues, and renders infidelity ſo criminal. One of the chief characteriſtics of Chriſtian charity is, that it believeth all things; becauſe this readineſs to believe muſt proceed from an humble, ſubmiſſive, and teachable temper. Whereas incredulity, when the evidence

dence is ſufficient, generally ariſes from men's vices, and at beſt, from a ſelf-conceited, ſuſpicious, and untractable diſpoſition, which is utterly incompatible with the whole tenour of that religion. This ſeems to have been the caſe of St. Thomas; who is here reproved for not believing the reſurrection of Chriſt, on the poſitive and unanimous teſtimony of all the Apoſtles (with whoſe honeſty and veracity he was perfectly acquainted, and had no reaſon to queſtion) becauſe he had not ſeen him with his own eyes, and felt him with his own hands: and, perhaps, he was not indulged with ſo inconteſtible proof as the reſt had been, in order to try and correct this incredulous and ſuſpicious diſpoſition. If this was really the fact, we may from thence reaſonably conclude, that many things are communicated to us, in the ſcriptures, in a manner not ſo perfectly clear and demonſtrative as they might have been, for the ſame cauſe, that is, to try and cultivate in us a diſpoſition ſo neceſſary in the compoſition of a Chriſtian.

ROMANS viii. 29.

Ὅτι ὃς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισε συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ.

For whom he did foreknow, he alſo did predeſtinate.

MUCH unneceſſary labour has been employed, by many learned divines and metaphyſicians, to reconcile the foreknowledge of God and the free-will of man; which never can be at variance, becauſe they have nothing to do with each other. The Apoſtle here ſays, "Whom he did foreknow, he alſo "did predeſtinate;" that is, Thoſe whom he foreknew would be wicked, he foreknows will be puniſhed; and thoſe whom he foreſees will be righteous, he foreſees alſo will be rewarded: but they are not wicked and puniſhed, or righteous and rewarded, becauſe he foreknows it; but he foreknows becauſe they are ſo. It is impoſſible but that an omniſcient Being, "in whom we live, and move, and have "our being," muſt foreſee all our thoughts and actions, and the conſequences which attend them, and therefore muſt foreknow our deſtination in the preſent, and in a future life: but his foreknowledge is not the cauſe of our elections, in which we enjoy as perfect liberty as if they were totally unknown; for the mere knowledge of one being, cannot poſſibly have any influence on the actions

ons of another. If any man is well acquainted with the diſpoſitions of another, he may nearly gueſs how he will conduct himſelf on any occaſion; if he knows they are profligate and prodigal, he may reaſonably conclude that he will deſtroy his health, waſte his fortune, and die in an hoſpital or a gaol; this accordingly happens, but not becauſe he had foreſeen it; that could not be the cauſe of this man's miſbehaviour or misfortune; which could be derived only from his own folly and extravagance. What is but conjecture in man, in God is certain preſcience; but the elections of free agents are no more controuled by the one than the other.—In this, I perceive nothing abſtruſe, difficult, or in the leaſt inconſiſtent with the juſtice of God, or the free-will of man. The cauſe of all our embarraſſments on this ſubject I take to be this:—From the nature of human conceptions and human language, we are under the neceſſity of applying ideas and expreſſions, relative to time, to the exiſtence, the attributes, and actions of the Supreme Being; with which they have no kind of relation; which leads us into innumerable abſurdities in our ſpeculations on this ſubject. With God there is no paſt, preſent, and to come: he knows all things equally at all times, and therefore cannot properly be ſaid to foreknow or predeſtinate any thing. This foreknowledge may be to him predeſtination;

nation; but with regard to us, as it affects not our conduct, it is in a moral ſenſe abſolutely nothing.

ROMANS xiii. 1, 2.

Πασα ψυχη ἐξουσιαις ὑπερεχουσαις ὑποτασσεσθω. Οὐ γαρ ἐστιν ἐξουσια εἰ μη ἀπο Θεου· αἱ δε ουσαι ἐξουσιαι, ὑπο του Θεου τεταγμεναι εἰσιν. Ὡστε ὁ ἀντιτασσομενος τῃ ἐξουσιᾳ, τῃ του Θεου διαταγῃ ἀνθεστηκεν· οἱ δε ἀνθεστηκοτες, ἑαυτοις κριμα ληψονται.

Let every ſoul be ſubject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whoſoever, therefore, reſiſteth the power, reſiſteth the ordinance of God: and they that reſiſt ſhall receive to themſelves damnation.

THROUGHOUT the whole New Teſtament we find, that both Chriſt and his Apoſtles were particularly careful to avoid giving any inſtructions concerning government, and on all ſubjects of a political nature; an example which the preachers of his goſpel would do well to imitate in all times. The paſſage here before us is almoſt the only deviation from this general rule, and is a ſtrong inſtance of the wiſdom and neceſſity of this extraordinary caution; for although it is nothing more than a general exhortation to obedience, it has at all times been perverted to ſpeak the language, and ſerve the iniquitous purpoſes, of contending parties. The advocates for arbitrary power, and flatterers of princes, have endeavoured to prove from it, that

that all ſovereigns are veſted, by divine appointment, with uncontroulable authority, accountable for the uſe of it to God alone, from whom they receive it; which no ſubject, however oppreſſed, can reſiſt, without reſiſting the ordinance of God, and incurring a puniſhment due to ſo preſumptuous a crime.—On the other ſide, the friends of liberty, who are enemies to all power in any hands but their own, connect theſe words with thoſe in the ſucceeding verſe, which declare, that "rulers are not a terror to good works, but "to the evil;" and from thence would perſuade us, that whenever a government is ſo much perverted from its original deſign, as to become a terror to good works, and not to evil (that is, whenever it is unjuſtly and tyrannically adminiſtered) it becomes then not only our right, but our duty, to reſiſt it. But in this, as in moſt controverſies, both ſides are in the wrong; for, if the arguments of the former were univerſally to prevail, there could be no liberty, if of the latter, no government, upon earth; but certainly Chriſtianity never intended to make men either ſlaves or rebels. We have here a wiſe and ſalutary injunction from St. Paul, to his diſciples then at Rome, to ſubmit quietly to any government under which they lived, without making any nice inquiry into the rights of thoſe who govern, or factious objections to their adminiſtration; which is not in the leaſt diſpenſed with by the following

following words; that "rulers are not a ter-
"ror to good works, but to evil;" which are added as a farther argument to induce all good men to ſubmit to and ſupport government, becauſe it is inſtituted for their protection; and we cannot ſuppoſe that the Apoſtle could mean by them to furniſh the Chriſtians with an excuſe for diſobedience, as his whole intention is clearly to enjoin them to ſubmit peaceably to the Roman government, which was then, in the trueſt ſenſe, a terror to good works, and not to evil; and particularly to their good works, for which they were daily oppreſſed and perſecuted. The doctrine of St. Paul, is plainly this, That every man ought to be ſubject to the powers that be (that is, to the eſtabliſhed government of the country in which he lives) for this wiſe and pious reaſon, becauſe all power muſt be derived from the appointment, or at leaſt from the permiſſion, of God; and this not only for wrath, but for conſcience ſake, (that is, not only for fear of incurring the diſpleaſure of that government, but as a duty required by him). This alſo is the doctrine of Chriſt himſelf, which he enforced, both by his precepts and example, on all occaſions. When Pilate ſaid unto him, "Knoweſt thou not that I have power to "crucify thee, and have power to releaſe "thee?" he anſwered, "Thou couldſt have "no power againſt me, except it was given

"thee

" thee from above;" and therefore he ſubmitted.

There may be caſes in which reſiſtance of the Supreme power may be juſtified by neceſſity, but ſuch ought never to be defined or pointed out before their arrival; when they come, they will ſpeak for themſelves, and men will be ready enough to hear them. Reſiſtance may ſometimes be practiſed, but ought never to be preached, for we ſtand in need of no leſſons to teach us diſobedience; and therefore we do not find, throughout the whole New Teſtament, one definition or recommendation of civil liberty, nor one command to fight or die in its defence. Theſe may be the glorious atchievements of heroes and patriots; but theſe are not liſted under the banners of Chriſt; the glory, as well as the duty, of his diſciples are, to ſuffer and ſubmit.—We ſhould remember alſo, that by reſiſtance, not only force and open rebellion is here to be underſtood, but all ſecret machinations, and all turbulent and factious endeavours to diſtreſs and impede government, ariſing from motives of ſelf-intereſt, ambition, or diſappointment. Theſe are, in fact, rebellion, with this only difference, that they are more treacherous and cowardly, more likely to ſucceed, and leſs to be puniſhed, and are therefore equally forbid under the denunciation of the ſame tremendous penalty.

1 CORINTHIANS i. 10.

Παρακαλω δε υμας, αδελφοι, δια του ονοματος του Κυριου ημων Ιησου Χριστου, ινα το αυτο λεγητε παντες, και μη ᾖ εν υμιν σχισματα.

Now I beſeech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing, and that there be no diviſions among you.

FROM theſe words of St. Paul, it is evident, that many different opinions, and many controverſies concerning them, had found their way into the Chriſtian churches, at ſo early a period as his life-time. Theſe he endeavoured to ſuppreſs, by thus enjoining them to ſpeak the ſame things; that is, to ſettle ſome uniform rule of faith and mode of worſhip, aſcertained by ſomething like creeds or articles, to which they could all aſſent; without which, no rule of faith, or form of worſhip, could be eſtabliſhed, nor diviſions amongſt them be prevented, deſtructive to every community civil or religious. It is true, indeed, that at the firſt promulgation of the goſpel, Chriſt himſelf impoſed no ſuch on his diſciples, who chiefly conſiſted of the moſt ignorant and illiterate vulgar, from whom nothing more was required than the bare acknowledgment that he was the Son of God, or the Meſſiah, who had been long expected. As this is but a ſingle propoſition, no difference of opinion concerning it could ariſe amongſt thoſe who believed,

believed, and therefore there could be no occaſion for any teſts to reconcile them. In a little time the great, the wiſe, and the learned ſages and philoſophers became proſelytes, and brought with them a variety of opinions from their reſpective ſchools in which they had been educated; which were blended with the doctrines of Chriſt, and very ſoon corrupted the purity of his religion. It then became neceſſary to fix ſome ſtandard of truth, to which every Chriſtian might reſort; and when theſe doctrines were committed to writing, in the books of the New Teſtament, from the uncertainty of all human language, and the various interpretations which they will admit of, this neceſſity was greatly increaſed, and is daily increaſing by time, which every day introduces new errors, and new diſputes about them; ſo that it ſeems impoſſible, that without ſome teſt, any religion can be eſtabliſhed in any country; and without ſome eſtabliſhment no national religion can ſubſiſt at all.

Hence appears the abſurdity of thoſe who would reject all religious teſts, becauſe Chriſt impoſed none on his diſciples when there were no errors to encounter nor controverſies to decide, and therefore none were wanted: to reject them now, becauſe they were then unneceſſary, is as ridiculous as to explode the uſe of all medicines, becauſe none were adminiſtered before any diſeaſes had made their appearance. But, ſay ſome,

If

If teſts are neceſſary, let them be as comprehenſive as poſſible; a declaration that we believe the ſcriptures, would be fully ſufficient. They ought, undoubtedly, to be as comprehenſive as the end of their inſtitution will admit; which is, to exclude all thoſe from a community, whoſe principles muſt induce them to betray and ſubvert it: but ſuch a declaration would, by no means, anſwer this purpoſe, becauſe our diſputes are not about the truth, but the meaning, of thoſe writings; and we ſee many who believe, or pretend to believe, them, and yet deny their aſſent to every material doctrine which they contain, and juſtify their diſſent by their own interpretations: a teſt, therefore, muſt ſpecify and decide upon the particular doctrines which are diſputed, or it is entirely uſeleſs and ineffectual. Such are the articles of our church, interpretations of the ſenſe of the ſcriptures, and explanations of the doctrines therein contained; as ſuch only we ſubſcribe them, not as objects of our reaſon or belief, any farther than we believe them to be ſo. This, ſurely, is very different from aſſerting their truth in the firſt inſtance; this depends on the veracity of the books which they profeſs to explain; and this on many other different conſiderations, as the authenticity of thoſe writings, the inſpiration, and degrees of inſpiration, of their authors, and the purity of their preſervation; with all which, in ſubſcribing to thoſe

articles, we have nothing to do. All that is incumbent on us is, to compare them with the books themſelves, which, if we fairly and candidly perform, I am perſuaded, we ſhall find them more conſonant with their real and genuine ſenſe, and more expreſſive of their true meaning, than modern theological language and ideas will admit of. The compilers never conſidered whether they are comformable to reaſon; if they expreſſed the true ſenſe of the ſcriptures, this was all they intended

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1 CORINTHIANS i. 25.

Ὅτι το μωρον τȣ Θεȣ, σοφωτερον των ἀνθρωπων ἐστι.

The fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than men.

THERE is ſomething, at firſt ſight, in this expreſſion, indecent, if not impious; but it means no more than this; that the doctrines of Chriſtianity, revealed by God, though they were "to the Jews a ſtumbling-"block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs," are wiſer (that is, better fitted to inſtruct mankind in the principles of true religion and ſound morality) than all the theological leſſons of the Rabbis of the one, or the Philoſophers of the other. St. Paul, who ſays this, was,

was, perhaps, as great a maſter of reaſon as any man of his own or of all ſucceeding ages; but he never employed it on ſubjects to which it cannot properly be applied. he never endeavours by it to explain the myſteries of the Chriſtian religion, or to reject them becauſe he is not able; he believed them himſelf, and taught them to others, juſt as they had been delivered by his Lord and Maſter, without attempting to reconcile them to his own reaſon, or that of his diſciples.

Chriſt frequently declared, that all mankind come into this world in a ſtate of depravity, guilt, and condemnation; that he was the Meſſiah, or the Son of God, who came to inſtruct and reform them, and to lay down his life as a propitiation for their tranſgreſſions; and that his heavenly Father, on their ſincere repentance, would accept his ſufferings and death as an atonement for their ſins: that they were free agents, and as ſuch accountable for their conduct; and yet conſtantly aſſerts, that they can do nothing of themſelves, but that all their thoughts and actions muſt proceed from the influence of God, "in "whom they live, and move, and have their "being." Theſe doctrines appeared to the learned philoſophers of Rome and Athens to be fooliſhneſs (that is, abſurdities, contradictory to every principle of human reaſon) and ſo they muſt have done to St. Paul,

had he brought them before the ſame tribunal; but he never preſumed to ſet up human reaſon as a judge of divine diſpenſations. He pretended not to controvert the truth of theſe doctrines, by arguing, that it was never poſſible that a wiſe, benevolent, and juſt Creator ſhould call into being creatures in a ſtate of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, and puniſh them for what they could not prevent; nor that, if they could be criminal, he ſhould accept the ſufferings of the innocent as a ſatisfaction for the crimes of the guilty: nor did he alledge, that Omnipotence itſelf could not create beings at the ſame time free agents, yet under perpetual influence and direction: all theſe doubts and difficulties he left to the diſcuſſion of the reaſoning divines and philoſophers of later ages; for himſelf, he was ſatisfied of the truth of theſe doctrines, by the authority from whence they were derived; and as ſuch, has tranſmitted them to us, in words as clear and explicit as the power of language can furniſh. He does not attempt to explain theſe myſteries, nor enters into any metaphyſical ſpeculations on the abſtract nature of guilt and puniſhment, of ſufferings or atonement, of free will, predeſtination, and divine influence. He aſſerts the facts only as he received them; which is all of which, in our preſent ſtate, we can be informed.

1 CORINTHIANS vii. 27.

Λελυσαι ἀπο γυναικος; μη ζητει γυναικα.

Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.

ST. Paul, throughout this whole chapter, recommends celibacy to Christians of both sexes, as most acceptable to God, and most consistent with the purity of their religion. Commentators, I know, in order to extricate themselves from some difficulties, have represented this advice but as local and temporal, occasioned only by the distresses and persecutions under which the Christian churches at that time laboured: but, if we believe his own words, we must see that this was not his only, nor yet his principal reason for giving it; but that he meant it generally, because he was of opinion that marriage, in Christians of both sexes, multiplied their attachments, and increased their cares concerning worldly affairs, and consequently diverted their attention from the sole object of their profession, which is the attainment of everlasting life. He says, "I would have "you without carefulness. He that is un- "married careth for the things which be- "long to the Lord; but he that is married "careth for the things of the world, how "he may please his wife.—The unmarried "woman careth for the things of the Lord, "that

" that ſhe may be holy both in body and ſpi-
" rit; but ſhe that is married careth for the
" things of the world, how ſhe may pleaſe
" her huſband." For this reaſon, St. Paul here ventures to avow a doctrine contradictory to the moral and political ſentiments of the wiſeſt philoſophers and legiſlators of all times, deſtructive of domeſtic happineſs and national proſperity, and which, if univerſally adopted, would eradicate the human ſpecies from the face of the earth.

From hence, if we believe that this great Apoſtle underſtood the ſpirit of the religion which he taught, we cannot avoid drawing this concluſion—That there may be actions, the performance of which may eſſentially contribute to raiſe individuals nearer to Chriſtian perfection, and to qualify them for happineſs in a future life, which may yet widely differ, both in their principles and their end, from moral virtues, and which, if univerſally practiſed, would be exceedingly detrimental to mankind in their preſent ſtate.

Of theſe celibacy is one; which, though deſtructive of the happineſs, and even of the exiſtence of mankind, may yet give leiſure to ſome few individuals to carry their piety, devotion, virtue, and reſignation, to a more exalted height than can be arrived at, under the many cares, connections, and embarraſſments incident to the married ſtate. In like manner, to ſell all that a man hath, and

and give it to the poor, is an act which, if generally practiſed, muſt put an end to all trade, manufactures, and induſtry, and introduce univerſal idleneſs and want; yet, the performance of it muſt proceed from ſo extraordinary a degree of faith, obedience, and ſelf-denial, that it may deſerve, and receive, an extraordinary reward. Precepts of this ſort, I apprehend, are not enjoined, but only occaſionally flung out, to teach us the nature of Chriſtian perfection; which is ſo adverſe to the world, and all its œconomy, purſuits, and occupations, that we are neither required or expected to attain it in our preſent ſtate, but ought to make as near approaches to it as our natural depravity and imperfection will permit.

From hence I am inclined to think, that, if monaſtic inſtitutions were really what they pretend to be, voluntary retreats from all worldly cares, occupations, and connections, wholly appropriated to religious contemplation, piety, and devotion, they might confer very eſſential benefits on the very few individuals who are capable of receiving them, without any detriment to the buſineſs or population of the world. But the great objection to them is this—that they are not made for man, nor man for them. The generality of mankind are formed for action, and not for contemplation, and come into the world to do its buſineſs, without perceiving the folly and inſignificance of what

what they are employed in. If multitudes therefore, are confined in theſe gloomy manſions, in contradiction to their inclination, and diſpoſitions, they muſt ſoon become, like other priſons, ſeminaries of ignorance, lazineſs, profligacy, and vice.

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1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

Ἡ ἀγαπη μακροθυμει, χρηστευεται· ἡ ἀγαπη ὐ ζηλοι· ἡ ἀγαπη ὐ περπερευεται, ὐ φυσιωται,

ὐκ ἀσχημονει, ὐ ζητει τα ἑαυτης, ὐ παροξυνεται, ὐ λογιζεται το κακον,

ὐ χαιρει ἐπι τη ἀδικια, συνχαιρει δε τη ἀληθεια.

παντα στεγει, παντα πιστευει, παντα ἐλπιζει, παντα ὑπομενει.

Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up,

Doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil;

Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

IN this inimitable portrait of Charity, drawn by the maſterly hand of St. Paul, we find every virtue which conſtitutes the character of a Chriſtian, who is a candidate for the kingdom of heaven; in which it is remarkable, that there is not one, which is not peculiarly calculated to qualify men to become members, and to enjoy and contribute to the felicity of that holy and happy ſociety.

" Charity ſuffereth long, and is kind;" that is, is patient, meek, and benevolent, qualities

ties the moſt eſſential to ſocial happineſs. "Charity envieth not;" for, as the envious are miſerable, in proportion to the happineſs they ſee others enjoy, they would be more miſerable in heaven than they are upon earth. "Charity vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed "up;" becauſe nothing ſo much diſturbs the peace of ſociety, as pride, inſolence, and ambition. "Doth not behave itſelf unſeemly;" that is, is not in converſation ill-bred, ſelf-ſufficient, diſputatious, and overbearing; offences, perhaps, more adverſe to ſocial happineſs, than many crimes of a more enormous kind. "Seeketh not her "own, is not eaſily provoked;" that is, rather chuſes to give up ſome part of her property, to which ſhe has an undoubted right, than be the cauſe of conteſts, animoſities, and litigations, and is not eaſily provoked to enter into them, either by intereſts or reſentment. "Thinketh no evil;" that is, ſuſpects no evil intentions in the hearts of others, as ſhe feels none in her own. "Re-"joiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in "the truth;" that is, takes no pleaſure in any kind of wickedneſs, nor ſees it with approbation in others; but is happy in the practice of every virtue which is preſcribed by reaſon and truth, and rejoiceth to ſee others follow her example. "Beareth all things," all injuries and inſults, without anger, or a wiſh for revenge or retaliation. "Believeth all things," becauſe meek, docile, diffident of

of her own judgment, and unſuſpicious of fraud and impoſition. "Hopeth all things," however unfavourable are their preſent appearances, will turn out for the beſt; and therefore "endureth all things," pain, ſickneſs, poverty, and misfortunes, with patience, and perfect reſignation to the will of God.

We have here a compleat catalogue of all thoſe virtues and diſpoſitions which are neceſſary to qualify a Chriſtian for the kingdom of heaven; in any one of which, if he is deficient, he muſt infallibly be excluded, however eminent his merits may be of another kind; of this the ſame Apoſtle aſſures us, who ſays, "Though I ſpeak with the "tongues of men and angels, and have not "charity, I am become as ſounding braſs, "or a tinkling cymbal; and though I have "the gift of prophecy, and underſtand all "myſteries, and all knowledge, and though "I have all faith, ſo that I could remove "mountains, and have not charity, I am "nothing. And though I beſtow all my "goods to feed the poor, and though I "give my body to be burned, and have not "charity, it profiteth me nothing;" that is, in regard to my attainment of the kingdom of heaven; becauſe there neither eloquence, nor prophecy, nor theological knowledge, nor faith, nor martyrdom, nor bounty to the poor, are wanted; but only ſuch a meek, humble, patient, peaceable, forgiving, and

and benevolent temper and behaviour, as is here ſpecified under the denomination of Charity, which alone can enable us to communicate and participate happineſs, either in the preſent or a future ſtate.

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 11.

Ὅτε ἤμην νηπιος, ὡς νηπιος ἐλαλον, ὡς νηπιος ἐφρονουν, ὡς νηπιος ἐλογιζομην· ὅτε δε γεγονα ἀνηρ, κατηργηκα τα του νηπιου.

When I was a child, I ſpake as a child, I underſtood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childiſh things.

IF we trace a man through the different periods of his life, from the cradle to the grave, he appears in ſuch a variety of ſhapes, that we can ſcarcely believe him to be the ſame creature. At firſt he is an helpleſs infant in his nurſe's arms, without ſpeech, underſtanding, or thought; then he is a child, ſpeaking as a child, underſtanding as a child, thinking as a child. He is next a rude, unformed, impetuous ſchool-boy; and then transformed into a youth, graceful, amiable, and amorous. At length, arrived at compleat manhood, he puts away childiſh things, and becomes a philoſopher, a warrior, or a ſtateſman. We then find him meaſuring out the heavens, inveſtigating other worlds, or buſied in the occupations of this. We ſee him commanding fleets or armies,

armies, or haranguing at the bar, in the pulpit, or the ſenate; and at laſt returning back to his primitive ſtate of childhood and imbecillity. Yet, under all theſe characters, he is but the ſame ſingle individual.

In what this identity conſiſts, or where it reſides, it is by no means eaſy to aſcertain. It cannot be in the body, becauſe every naturaliſt knows that the component parts of the body are in perpetual motion, are continually diſcharged by various evacuations, and replaced by the particles of our daily food; ſo that, in the courſe of a few years, not a ſingle atom of our original frame can poſſibly remain. If a man loſes a leg or an arm, or even both legs and arms, he is not leſs the ſame perſon; and therefore we have reaſon to conclude, that his identity would not be affected by the loſs of his whole body; and therefore in that it cannot reſide.

It cannot be in the mind, becauſe the changes of the mind are as great and as frequent as thoſe of the body, throughout the different ſtages of human life; the ideas of a man and thoſe of a child are as unlike as his features and his ſtature; at different ages we put away all our former modes of thinking and acting, and adopt new opinions, purſuits, inclinations, and attachments. Many diſeaſes deſtroy all our mental faculties, derange our reaſon, extinguiſh our conſciouſneſs, and obliterate our memories; and yet our identity

identity remains unimpaired. If, therefore, it is not to be found either in the body or the mind, there muſt be ſome permanent principle in the human compoſition, in which it does reſide, totally unaffected by the continual alterations of them both;—and this, I think, is a new and unanſwerable proof of the exiſtence and duration of the ſoul.

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1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 12.

Βλεπομεν γαρ αρτι δι ἐσοπτρυ ἐν αἰνιγματι.

For now we ſee through a glaſs, darkly.

SO darkly, indeed, do we ſee the things of a future life, and ſo erroneouſly thoſe of the preſent, that we form very falſe eſtimates of them both; and act ſtill more abſurdly than we judge. There are few who are not convinced that there will be a future ſtate of retribution after death, and none who know not that the death of every man may be inſtantaneous, and cannot be far off; and yet they take no care to prepare themſelves for the former, and think ſo little of the latter, that, on any unexpected event, it is become proverbial to ſay, I thought of it no more than of my dying day. We fear nothing ſo much as death; and yet there is nothing which we think of ſo little. We are more tenacious of riches the leſs we want them, and toil away the beſt part of our days to enable us to paſs a few in a quiet leiſure, which no man could ever enjoy

enjoy who had ever been buſy. We infuſe into our children the ſame falſe ideas, and thus tranſmit abſurdities from generation to generation. We educate them all for this life; there is not one ſchool for the next. "What man is there of you," ſays Chriſt, "who, if his ſon aſk for a fiſh, will give him "a ſerpent †?" Few, indeed, with regard to this world are ſo fooliſh or ſo cruel, but, with regard to another, it is univerſally practiſed. Every prudent parent endeavours to infuſe into his ſon the wiſdom of the ſerpent, rather than the innocence of the fiſh. He ſpares no pains to qualify them for the higheſt poſts in the kingdom of the earth, but his ambition extends not, like that of the mother of Zebedee, to gain them rank in the kingdom of heaven. Do we hear any father, however worthy and reſpectable, thus addreſs his ſon, in the language of a philoſopher and a Chriſtian? I ſhall leave you, my ſon, an eſtate, ſmall indeed in the eſtimation of the world, but ſufficient to afford you, not only the neceſſaries but the comforts of life, and even to adminiſter them to the wants of others: waſte it not in vice and extravagance, nor yet labour to increaſe it by frauds and rapine, nor even by honeſt induſtry in profeſſions which will not allow you leiſure, either to enjoy this life or prepare for another; but, above all other me-

† Matt. vii. 10.

thods,

thods, ſeek not to augment it by a mercenary marriage, which cannot fail to lead you into an inextricable labyrinth of wickedneſs and miſery; and remember, that mutual fidelity and affection will give you more happineſs than wealth is able to beſtow.

The very reverſe of this is the leſſon inculcated by every prudent parent, and ratified by univerſal approbation.—My ſon, he ſays, you will inherit an ample fortune; but let not this tempt you to ſit down quietly in an indolent inſignificance: there are a variety of methods by which you may improve it, and advance yourſelf in the world; by a diſcreet marriage, you, may double it, if you do not fooliſhly ſacrifice your intereſts; the law, the church, and the army are all open to your endeavours, and may reward them with the higheſt poſts of honour and profit: the Eaſt and Weſt are ſtill unexhauſted, and ready to pour their treaſures into the laps of the brave and enterprizing. By ſuch inſtructions are the ſeeds of avarice and ambition ſown in the minds of youth, which afterwards infallibly produce the bitter fruits of iniquity and diſappointment.

That mankind ſhould thus continue, through all ages and generations, to think, ſpeak, and act in contradiction to their reaſon, their principles, and their intereſt, is a wonderful phænomenon; which can be occaſioned ſolely by this ſingle circumſtance, that

that they "see through a glass, darkly:" whenever they see clearly, they seldom judge wrong; the defect is not in their reason, but in their knowledge; every one would pursue his own interest, if he knew what it was, and, in fact, every one does pursue it, but the generality totally mistake it. No man would choose riches before happiness, power before quiet, or fame before safety, if he knew the true value of each: no man would prefer the transitory and worthless enjoyment of this world to the permanent and sublime felicity of a better, if he had a clear prospect of them both; but we see the former through a mist, which always magnifies, and the latter appears to be at so great a distance, that we scarce see it at all; and therefore it makes little impression on our senses, and has as little influence on our conduct.

Why our all-wise and benevolent Creator should have thought proper thus to present all objects to our view, "through a glass, "darkly," is one of the many divine dispensations for which we are unable to account; but this we may know, that if we saw the things of the world clearly, and in a true light, the business and œconomy of it, constituted as it is, could not go on; our pursuits would all be at an end, when we saw there was nothing worth pursuing, our hopes would vanish, our expectations be extinguished, and an universal stagnation would ensue: and

and from hence we have reaſon to conclude, that a diſtinct proſpect of the things of another world, while we reſide in this, would be equally detrimental to the well-being of both.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 8.

Το λοιπον, ἀδελφοι, ὁσα ἐστιν ἀληθη, ὁσα σεμνα, ὁσα δικαια, ὁσα ἁγνα, ὁσα προσφιλη, ὁσα ευφημα, εἰ τις ἀρετη και εἰ τις ἐπαινος, ταυτα λογιζεσθε.

Finally, brethren, whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praiſe, think on theſe things.

IT is not, I think, a little ſurprizing to ſee many Chriſtian divines, of the firſt learning and abilities, employing that learning and thoſe abilities, and much of their time, in framing laborious ſyſtems of ethics from the law of nature, whilſt they have the books of the New Teſtament continually lying open before their eyes. In Plato and Ariſtotle, in Cicero and Seneca, this was a laudable and uſeful undertaking; but, in a Chriſtian, it is neither uſeful or meritorious, nor wiſer than if any one ſhould chuſe to ſhut his eyes in the brighteſt day-light, only to try if he was able to grope out his way in the dark. It is now as impoſſible for any man to form a religious and moral inſtitution by the mere efforts of human reaſon, as to ſee by a

farthing candle in the midſt of a meridian ſunſhine. He muſt unavoidably adopt the doctrines and precepts of the Goſpel, and then miſtake them for his own. If his own are true and juſt, they muſt be exactly the ſame; and if they differ, they are unworthy of notice. If we believe the doctrine and precepts tranſmitted to us in the New Teſtament to be a revelation from God, we cannot, without preſumption, ſearch out for any other, nor even accept the ſame on an inferior authority. Whatever may be their authority, their unrivalled excellence is indiſputable. The moral leſſons of Chriſt are all ſo conciſe, ſo clear, ſo unencumbered with definitions and inquiries, and enforced by parables ſo appoſite and inſtructive, as brings them nearer to our hearts, and renders them not only ſuperior to, but unlike all which had ever before been publiſhed to the world. In omitting all unneceſſary diſquiſitions on moral and religious ſubjects, the Apoſtles imitated the example of their maſter. In the paſſage now before us, St. Paul, writing to the brethren at Philippi, enjoins them to think on, that is, not to forget to practiſe, "whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure." He takes it for granted, that thoſe to whom he wrote, as well as all mankind, knew what things are true, honeſt, juſt, and pure; and therefore he enters not into any metaphyſical inquiries into the abſtract nature of truth, honeſty, juſtice, and purity, which

which are always uſeleſs, and ſometimes detrimental, a they never induce men to be virtuous, and ſometimes ſerve to furniſh them with excuſes for vices. Men want not knowledge of their duty, but inclination to perform it. A definition of virtue will never make any one leſs profligate, nor an enquiry concerning the origin of property make any one more honeſt; no more than a diſſertation on optics will make a man ſee, or a receipt for diſtilling brandy or brewing ſtrong beer will make him ſober.

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2 THESSALONIANS ii. 11.

Και δια τυτο πεμψει αὐτοις ὁ Θεος ἐνεργειαν πλανης, εἰς το πιστευσαι αὐτες τῳ ψευδει.

And for this cauſe God ſhall ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a lie.

IN this, and ſeveral other places in both the Old and New Teſtament, God is repreſented as leading men into errors deſtructive to their innocence and happineſs, ſometimes by his own, and ſometimes by the influence of intermediate ſpirits. How is this reconcileable with his juſtice and goodneſs? How can any evil proceed from infinite goodneſs, or any deluſion from the fountain of all truth? No commentator or preacher on theſe texts, that I know of, has yet been able to anſwer theſe queſtions in a manner ſatisfactory to reaſon or common ſenſe.

But this difficulty, like moſt others in our interpretations of ſcripture, ariſes from our own ignorance and our inſenſibility of it. We boldly and preſumptuouſly aſſert, that God cannot do one thing, and that he will not do another, becauſe ſuch things ſeem to us to be inconſiſtent with thoſe attributes which we have thought proper to beſtow upon him; but we know ſo little of the nature of good and evil, of truth or falſehood, of God or man, or of the relations between a Creator and his creatures, that we are utterly incapable to preſcribe limits to his power, or rules to his will; as well might a worm pretend to decide on the councils of princes, and the policies of empires, as man to paſs judgment on the diſpenſations of the Almighty. We ſay, God cannot be the cauſe of any evil; but we know not what is evil; he may be, and is, the cauſe of many things which appear, and really are, evils to us, however they may be neceſſary to the production of univerſal good. We ſay, he cannot be the cauſe of any deluſion; but why not? truth is by no means the criterion of virtue, as ſome philoſophers would perſuade us; deluſion, in itſelf, is neither good or evil; its merit or criminality depends on the end for which it is intended: it is no crime to deceive men for their entertainment, much leſs for their benefit; there is no immorality in writing a play, a poem, or romance, becauſe it is fiction, but great merit, if

if it is calculated to promote virtue, or to diſcourage vice. The whole of this life is a ſucceſſion of deluſions, kindly impoſed upon us by our Creator, to enable us to ſupport the ſufferings, and carry on the buſineſs of it. The fallacy of each we diſcover in its turn, but never till it has attained its end. It is all mere ſcenery, beautiful illuſion, in which every object, being placed at a proper diſtance, and ſeen through a falſe medium, appears as it ought, but never as it is. Wealth, honours, and pleaſures, are exhibited in the cleareſt light, to incite our induſtry; but the vanity of their poſſeſſions is hid for a time under a cloud, that we may not ſink into ſloth and inactivity. Thus we may be ſaid to believe a lie, that is, what is not true; unexperienced, we believe that the proſperity of this world will make us compleatly happy, that the period of life is of long duration, and that the hour of death is ever at a great diſtance; in every one of which we find ourſelves conſtantly deceived; on which beneficent deception all our enjoyments, hopes, expectations, and purſuits intirely depend. If God, therefore, by means of theſe kind deluſions, diſpenſes undeſerved bleſſings on mankind, why may he not ſometimes inflict ſuch puniſhments upon them as their offences may have deſerved, by the ſame means, either by his own power, or the operations of intermediate ſpirits? We know that he has given us power to deceive and

and enſnare, as well as to deſtroy, inferior animals; a power which we daily exerciſe without ſcruple, without arraigning his juſtice or our own. Why then may he not, with equal juſtice, grant the ſame power over us, to beings of ſuperior orders?

We may further add, that there are many paſſages, in both the Old and New Teſtament, ſimilar to this before us, which are, in fact, nothing more than modes of expreſſion uſually made uſe of by the writers of thoſe books, who generally impute every event and action, whether good or evil, juſt or unjuſt, to God himſelf, without any reference to ſecond cauſes. Every diſpoſition of men's hearts, and every act proceeding from them, are aſcribed immediately to God; by which nothing more is to be underſtood, than that ſuch were mens hearts, and ſuch things were done. This, in a large and extenſive view, is certainly right, becauſe the great Creator and diſpoſer of all things muſt primarily be the cauſe of all diſpoſitions, actions, and events; becauſe the Firſt Cauſe muſt be the cauſe of every cauſe from whence they can proceed: but how this is conſiſtent with that freewill, of which we know and feel ourſelves are poſſeſſed, is far above the reach of our imperfect comprehenſions; reaſon aſſures us that both are true, and ſcripture every where confirms this concluſion.

JAMES

JAMES iv. 1.

Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ μάχαι ἐν ὑμῖν; οὐκ ἐνθεῦθεν, ἐκ τῶν ἡδονῶν ὑμῶν τῶν στρατευομένων ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ὑμῶν;

From whence come wars and fighting among you? come they not hence, even of your luſts?

AS war and peace ſo eſſentially affect the morals, as well as the happineſs of mankind, it ſeems extraordinary that the great Author of the Chriſtian religion ſhould have given no directions on ſo important a ſubject. The Apoſtle here decides nothing concerning the lawfulneſs of wars amongſt Chriſtians, but only informs us from whence they proceed, which is from their ungoverned paſſions, anger and revenge, avarice and ambition; nor do we find, in any part of the New Teſtament, that they are either abſolutely allowed or poſitively forbid. This remarkable ſilence, I think, is not difficult to be accounted for; becauſe, if Chriſt had encouraged, or even expreſsly permitted, his diſciples to carry on wars and fightings, he would have given the ſanction of divine authority to all the wickedneſs and miſery which inevitably attend them; and if he had abſolutely forbid them to fight on any occaſion, he muſt have left every country, in which his religion ſhould prevail, a defenceleſs prey to every infidel invader; he prudently, therefore, rather choſe to leave their defence to the operations of their own paſſions and vices, which

which he knew, notwithſtanding all his pacific precepts, would always be ſufficient for that purpoſe.—But although in this, as well as in many other inſtances, Providence employs the iniquities of men to bring about beneficial ends, this leſſens not their criminality, or juſtifies thoſe who commit them. All the precepts of Chriſt, and every principle of the religion which he taught, are diametrically oppoſite to thoſe of war: theſe require a poor, meek, and humble ſpirit; which thoſe repreſent as infamous and contemptible: theſe exhort us to live peaceably with all men; which is certainly incompatible with a ſtate of war: theſe recommend patience and forbearance under the greateſt inſults; thoſe the quickeſt and moſt violent reſentment: theſe enjoin us to love and ſerve our enemies; thoſe to deſtroy them with fire and ſword. How at the ſame time we can ſerve two maſters, or how their commands can be made conſiſtent with each other, I muſt leave to ſome pious and valiant Chriſtian hero to explain.

FINIS.